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THE
GOLD DEMON;

OR,

LAMORA, THE MAID OF THE CANON.

A ROMANCE OF THE FAR WEST.

NEW YORK.
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THE GOLD DEMON.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS RESCUE.

THE wind was howling over the prairie, with a sharp penetrating power, while a few feathery flashes eddying through the air, showed that although it was the season of spring, yet in this elevated region of the Far West, there was scarcely the first premonition of its breath.

The night was closing in and the vast peaks of the Black Hills, that had loomed up white and grand in the distance, were gradually fading from view until they merged into the thickly gathering gloom, while the blasts that whirled the snow in blinding drifts about their tops, came moaning and sweeping over the bleak prairie, as if searching for some one to inclose in its icy grasp, and to strangle out of life.

Now and then the desolate howl of the mountain wolf, came borne on the wind, adding to the gloomy desolation, of the scene, while the dark, swarming multitude of buffaloes hurried over the frozen ground, as if fearful of being caught in the chilling blast. It was a bad night to be lost upon the prairie.

Is there no one abroad to-night?

From the grove of hardy cottonwood yonder, a starlike point of light suddenly flashes out upon the night. Surely, that is the light of some hunter's camp-fire.

A party of emigrants have halted for the night, and this is the first camp-fire that has been started, for it is not only cold, but there is cooking to be done, and a fire is indispensable.

The emigrant party numbers some twenty men, a half-dozen women, and about double that number of children. They are on their way to Oregon, and have penetrated thus

far without encountering any obstacle worth noting, although for days they had been journeying through the very heart of the Indian country.

Among the party was a man named Fred Hammond, who had joined it more for the purpose of adventure than any thing else. He was mounted on a magnificent black horse, was an amateur hunter, and a general favorite with the company.

Among the latter was not a single experienced mountaineer or prairie-man. They had secured the service of an old man, who professed to be thoroughly acquainted with the overland route to Oregon, but there was more than one who suspected his knowledge and believed he was nothing but a fraud.

Extremely good fortune had attended them thus far. They had caught sight of numerous parties of Indians, and indeed scarcely a day passed without something being seen of them. They had exchanged shots at quite a distance, but no harm had befallen the whites, and they had penetrated thus far on their way to distant Oregon.

But Hammond and one or two of the members were filled with misgiving. Through the day they had seen evidence of an immense Indian party being in their vicinity, and they feared the worst. It was with pain that they saw the huge camp-fire kindled, and Hammond called his comrade, Beers, to one side, and said, in his earnest voice:

"I tell you, things look darker than ever before."

"So I think."

"I believe we are followed by over a thousand Indians, and they intend attacking us to-night."

"What shall we do?"

"God only knows; I don't like that camp-fire."

"Let it burn for a short time; they don't need it long, and then it can be allowed to die out."

"But it will betray our position."

"Do you suppose there is any means possible by which we can conceal it?"

"Not entirely, but partly."

As the night deepened it became of intense darkness. There was no moon, and the sky was entirely overcast with

clouds, so that there was scarcely any light at all. The few flakes of snow that were whirling through the air had entirely ceased, but the wind still whistled through the grove.

"There is a moon up there," said Hammond, "and if the clouds break away at all, we shall have enough light to guide us on our way."

On account of the danger, which all knew threatened them, a number proposed that as soon as their animals had had sufficient rest, they should move out of the timber and continue their journey; but this was finally overruled, as they were not only likely to go astray in the darkness, but the Indians could easily find them, from the unavoidable noise made by their wagons.

If attacked on the open prairie at night, they were entirely at the mercy of their assailants, who could easily encircle and tomahawk and shoot them all, while in the grove they could make a fight with some prospect of success.

So it was prudently determined to remain where they were.

In the course of an hour, when there was no imperative necessity for a fire, it was allowed to slumber and finally die out. The wagons were placed in a rude circle, with the animals within, while the women and children, and such men as were relieved from duty, sought their quarters for the night, and soon silence rested upon all.

A double guard was set. Ten men were scattered around the outer edge of the globe at regular distances from each other, on the alert for the first indications of danger.

Beers and Hammond stood next to each other, and the former finally left his station and took his position beside the latter.

"What's the use?" he muttered, by way of apology "When it's so dark that you can't see any thing, where's the good of straining your eyes? As we have got to depend on our sense of hearing, we'll help each other."

The air was so sharp and keen that they had great difficulty in keeping themselves comfortable. They dare not stamp their feet or swing their arms, and such movements as they made, were made with a stealth and caution that nearly robbed them of all their virtue.

At the end of an hour the sky gave some signs of clearing. It was somewhat lighter overhead, but still the earth below was little benefited thereby. There was scarcely any variations in the wind, although several fancied that it had somewhat decreased.

Another hour passed drearily away, and then Beers suddenly laid his hand on the arm of Hammond.

"What is it?"

"Hark!"

Borne to them on the wind came the distant but distinct sound of a horse's feet, as he galloped over the hard prairie.

The rapid clomp of the hoofs were heard for an instant, and then the varying wind swept the sound away from their ears, and all was still.

But in a moment they rattled out again with startling distinctness—then grew fainter—died away and rung out once more.

"Some one is riding fast," said Beers.

"And he is coming this way," added Hammond.

A few minutes convinced them of the truth. A single horseman was riding at great speed over the prairie, and was manifestly aiming straight for the grove where the emigrants had halted for the night.

As a matter of course, all the sentinels had observed it by this time, and there was great excitement among them. They gathered about Hammond to receive his directions.

"Go back to your stations," said he. "Keep your eyes and ears open for others, whether they be mounted or afoot, and I will attend to this one."

His orders were obeyed, for he was looked upon as having authority in this matter, and with an interest difficult to understand they awaited the coming of the horseman.

As the latter came nearer, he seemed to be heading straight for the point where Hammond and Beers were standing.

During the last few moments, the sky had cleared so rapidly that objects could be distinguished for quite a distance, and the two men strained their eyes through the gloom to catch sight of the stranger.

"There he is," whispered Hammond, as the dim outlines of a horse was discovered through the darkness.

The horseman had reined his horse down to a walk, and was advancing quite cautiously. He continued onward until within a dozen feet of the two men, when he reined up.

"Who comes there?" asked Hammond.

"A friend."

"What do you seek?"

"You are in great danger, and I have come to warn you of it."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Beers, in an undertone; "that is a woman!"

Hammond had noticed the wondrously soft and musical voice, and he now walked forward, so as to stand beside the horse. The dim light showed that Beers spoke the truth; it was a woman seated upon the horse.

"May I ask your name?"

There was a moment's hesitation and then the female answered:

"I am Lamora; and I speak the truth."

"We do not doubt it," responded the amazed Hammond.

"What is it you have to say?"

"A thousand Blackfeet warriors are coming down on this grove, two or three hours before sunrise, and if you remain, there will not be one who will escape alive."

"What shall we do?"

"Make ready as soon as possible and start westward. Let there not be a moment's delay, and you will be saved."

"But they can follow us to-morrow, (if not to-night,) and attack us by daylight."

"They can, but they will not," replied Lamora, with the greatest earnestness. "This is a great war-party on their way southward to fight the Cheyennes. They are to meet a long ways off to-morrow; the Blackfeet have given themselves just enough time to massacre you and your friends, if you remain in this grove, as they expect you will; but if they come here and do not find you, they will have no time to follow up your wagons, and thus, you see, if you improve your time, you will be saved."

"Beers," said Hammond, turning to the man beside him, "rouse the men and have this thing done without a moment's

lost time, while I make a few more inquiries of our unknown friend."

Beers darted away, and almost immediately was detected the rapid moving to and fro, and the bustle of getting ready to start.

"Your orders are being obeyed," said Hammond, addressing the lady, who still sat her horse beside him.

"It is well that they are," she replied, with a sigh of relief; "the Blackfeet know that you are encamped here, and they have no reason to think you will not be here when they are ready to strike."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Over that ridge of hills, several miles to the northward. They have been riding, throwing the tomahawk, and making every preparation for the great battle which is to come off to-morrow between them and the Cheyennes."

"This, then, is only a diversion?"

"That is it; they naturally think that, as they find you in their way, they may as well indulge in a little preliminary practice."

"We were fearing an attack, as we knew that there were a large number of Indians in our vicinity, and we heard the sound of your horse's feet long before we heard you. Being thus warned and prepared, could we not have made a successful defense, with the shelter of these trees, which you probably know are very numerous about us?"

"No," was the instant answer of Lamore; "if there were no more than a hundred Blackfeet, you might repel them; but a thousand would overwhelm you. There are sounds of preparation upon the part of your friends."

"Yes; we shall soon be on the move."

"Keep straight to the westward; there is now enough light to prevent your going astray, and you will find, when daylight comes, that Heaven has brought you out of all danger. Farewell!"

Edmund Hammond could interpose, or even thank her, the horse had wheeled about and was off on a gallop. Almost instantly, he vanished in the darkness, and the rattle of his hoofs grew fainter and fainter, until they, too, died out in the distance.

"*Lamora*," repeated the young man. "I surely have heard that name pronounced by other lips than hers.

"Who is she? Where did she come from?"

"She was sent by heaven, most assuredly."

While conversing with the girl, Hammond had approached her horse as near as possible, and had managed to gain a distinct view of her face. There is something in the dim, misty moonlight which softens the asperities even of the repulsive countenance, but he was certain that the most beautiful creature upon which he had ever looked was conversing with him. Her half-civilized dress, and her wealth of flowing black hair, partly assisted in her enchanting appearance; but the face itself was one of unsurpassed loveliness.

The peculiar circumstances under which they encountered gave Hammond an equally peculiar interest in her, and a pang of disappointment went through his heart when he found that he was standing alone, and that she had left him so abruptly.

But he had important matters in hand for the time, and he gave his whole thought to them.

Every one was working with the energy of people who were convinced that their lives depended upon the result. The teams were harnessed, the wagons loaded up, and at the end of half an hour the whole train moved out of the grove, toward the west.

Before starting, men had ridden out on the prairie in every direction, and returned with the announcement that nothing could be heard of the Blackfeet, and all pressed forward with the greatest vigor and determination.

With the passing of the immediate danger, the thoughts of the strange woman who had befriended them returned to Fred Hammond. He felt a powerful interest in her, and, as he was riding beside the guide of the company, he turned to him rather abruptly, and asked:

"Have you ever heard of *Lamora*?"

"Heard of her?" repeated the latter, in surprise; "wasn't I telling you all about her the other day?"

"So you were; I was sure I had heard her name before, but I could not recollect from whom. Who is she?"

"She is a white girl, living with a tribe of Indians, somewhere up north of us, and she has done many such things as

this for the white people crossing the plains. I have heard of her for years as doing the same thing."

"What kind of a looking person is she?"

"Just the handsomest creature that ever lived! Wait till you get a good look at her."

Hammond was not long in finding that their guide knew very little more regarding her than he had already told, although he gossiped and chatted about her until daylight.

When light at last broke over the prairie, many eyes were cast anxiously backward, but not a sign of the Indians was visible. The warning of Lamora had saved them!

Fred Hammond could not drive the thoughts of this beautiful being from his mind, and finally he determined that, as he had joined the company for the sake of adventure, he would turn back and seek adventures of the most romantic kind.

So, on the afternoon of this day, he quietly withdrew from the company, and started at an easy gallop in the direction that the guide had indicated led toward the home of the mysterious and beautiful Lamora; and, leaving our hero for a time to himself, we must now bestow our attention upon others, who have a part to play in this narrative. *Love*, the passion of our nature, will play the mischief with all of us, and Fred Hammond was soon off on this great "love-chase" of his life.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT IS IT?

BLACK TOM and old Stebbins had a hard day's ride of it, and they drew the rein in a heavily-timbered grove, just as the sun was setting, with the intention of camping there for the night.

They were well up toward the Black Hills, in a country broken with forest, hill and prairie, and interspersed with streams of every size, from the rivulet and foaming cañon to the broad, serenely-flowing river.

They were in a region infested with grizzly bears, and the

hercest of wild animals, and above all with the daring and treacherous Blackfeet—those dreaded red-skins of the North-West, with whom the hunters and trappers are compelled to wage unceasing warfare, and who are more feared than any tribe that the white men encounter.

So these veteran prairie-men proceeded with all their caution and kept their senses on the alert for any "sign" of their old enemies, who came down sometimes like the sweep of the war-wind, and who had the unpleasant trait, after being thoroughly whipped, of not staying whipped.

Dismounting from their ponies, old Stebbins walked back to the edge of the timber, and carefully made a circuit around it. He was thus enabled to gain quite an extended view of the surrounding prairie, although his view was broken and obstructed in several places.

Tired and ravenously hungry as he was, he moved cautiously and made his tour of observation as complete as it was possible to make it. Finally he turned about and joined his companion, who had kindled a good roaring camp-fire during his absence, and had turned both horses loose to crop their supper among the luxuriant grass and budding undergrowth of the grove.

"Well, Steb., how do you find the horyzon?" asked Black Tom, who bore that sobriquet on account of his exceedingly dark complexion.

"Cl'ar, as the sky above?"

"Nary a sign?"

"Yas—thar's signs, but the sky is powerful cl'ar."

This apparently contradictory answer requires a little explanation. Old Stebbins had detected signs of Indians—indeed had indubitable evidence that they were in the neighborhood; but the signs which indicated this fact to them indicated still further that the same Indians, or Blackfeet, as they undoubtedly were, had no suspicion of the presence of white men. This, therefore, disclosed a "clear sky," so far as the trappers were directly concerned, although they were thus made aware that there was a dark, threatening cloud low down in the horizon, which might rise, and send forth its deadly lightning.

Looking to the westward, Stebbins saw a wooded ridge a hundred rods or so distant, which shut off any further view in

that direction ; but, about a half-mile beyond this, his keen eyes detected the smoke of a camp-fire. It was very faintly defined against the clear blue sky, but it was unmistakable, and indicated that a party of Indians were encamped there.

Why, then, did Black Tom sit so unconcernedly upon the ground, after hearing this announcement, and permit their fire to burn so vigorously, when its ascending vapor might make known to the Blackfeet what they did not even suspect?

Because night was closing around them, and ere the red-skins would be likely to detect the suspicious sign, it would be concealed in the gathering darkness—and the dense shrubbery effectually shut out the blaze from any wanderers that might venture that way.

As there was nothing at hand immediately to engage their attention, the trappers, after gathering a goodly quantity of fuel, reclined upon the ground, and leisurely smoked their pipes.

"Teddy is gone a powerful while," remarked Tom, as he looked up and saw that it was quite dark ; "he can't be as hungry as we are."

"He's seed the sign—and he's keefal—hello!"

At that instant, the report of a gun was heard, sounding nearly in the direction of the Indian encampment. The trappers listened a moment, and then Tom added, in the most indifferent manner possible :

"Wonder ef that chap's got throwed."

"Hope not," returned his companion, "for ef he is we'll have to go to bed on an empty stomach, or scratch out, and hunt up our supper for ourselves."

The individual who had occasioned this remark was Teddy O'Doherty, a rattling, jovial Irishman, who had got lost from an emigrant train several years before, and in wandering over the prairie fell into the hands of the trappers, with whom he had consorted ever since.

He had spent enough time among the beaver-runs of the north-west, to become quite an expert hunter ; he had acquired a certain degree of caution in his movements, but there still remained a great deal of the rollicking, dare-devil nature, which was born in him, and he had already been engaged in several desperate scrimmages with the red-skins, and the wonder was that he had escaped death so long.

Like a true Irishman, he dearly loved a row, and undoubtedly he frequently "pitched into" a party of Indians, out of a hankering for it, when prudence told him to keep a respectable distance between him and his foes.

On this afternoon, when riding forward over the prairie, old Stebbins indicated to him the grove where they proposed spending the night, when the Irishman instantly demanded:

"And what is it yees are a-gwine to make yer soup upon?"

"We'll have to hunt up something," replied Tom; "we're out of ven'son, and thar don't seem to be any fish handy."

"Do yees go ahead, and make yerselves aisy," instantly added Teddy. "I'll make a sarnit around the hill yonder, jist as I used to sarcle around Bridget O'Moghlogoh's cabin, when I went a-coortin', to decide whether to go down the chimney or through the pig-stye in the parlor. Do yees rest aisy, I say, and I'll bring the sooper to yees."

And with this merry good by, he struck his wearied pony into a gallop, and speedily disappeared over the ridge to which reference has been already made, and the trappers passed on to the grove, where we must spend a few minutes with them, before following the fortunes of the Irishman, who speedily dove, head foremost, into the most singular and astounding adventure of his life.

The hunters listened some time for a return shot or shout to the gun, but none was heard.

"It was Teddy's bull-dog," said old Stebbins. "I know the sound of that critter, for I've fired it often 'nough."

"Wal, thar hain't been any answer to it, as I guess it wa p'inted at some animal instead of red skin."

This seemed to be the conclusion of both, as they gave no further thought to the absent member of their party.

It was a mild day in late summer, before the vegetation had given any indication of the approaching cold season. The hunters had ventured thus early into the trapping-grounds for two reasons: one was to mislead the Blackfeet, who would be looking for their coming a month or two later, and the other reason will become apparent hereafter.

"Tomorrow we'll strike the trapping grounds," said old Stebbins, in his careless manner, as he lazily whiffed his pipe.

"It's two months yet afore we need set our traps," said Black Tom.

"That 'll give us plenty of time to find out all we want to," replied his companion.

"Yas," added the other, somewhat significantly; "we'll l'arn whether thar'll be any need of our ever settin' them ag'in or not."

"Not quite that," said old Stebbins, with a laugh and ~~shake~~ of the head. "I don't b'l'ieve *that*."

"I don't know," continued Black Tom, who seemed in the best of spirits; "it looked powerful like it when we had to dig out last spring."

"It did, summat—"

"B'ars and beavers!" exclaimed Tom, suddenly coming to the upright position, jerking his coonskin hat from his head and dashing it upon the ground, "don't you remember, Steb.?"

"Remember what?" demanded his companion, not a little startled at his manner.

"It was right hyar that we see'd *that*!"

"See'd what?"

"Old Steb., you're a thunderin' fool!" replied Tom, with an expression of disgust. "I guess you're gettin' chills. I s'pose, you don't remember that—that—what shall I call it?—that we see'd near hyar?"

"How did I farget it? How did we all farget it—Tolly, too?"

There was no doubt that Stebbins recalled the creature to which reference had been made. Unquestionably brave as both of these men were, their appearance showed that they were frightened. Their bronzed and scarred faces were pale, and they looked into each other's eyes in silence, both revolving "terrible thoughts."

"Right out thar," said Stebbins, speaking in a terrified whisper, and pointing toward the open prairie, over which they had just ridden; "how was it that we wa'n't on the look out for it?"

"Dunno, when we've been talkin' 'bout it all the way. It's too bad that it should come right hyar--just near the very spot we're after."

"Mebbe it's gone away," added Stebbins, speaking not **his** belief, but **his** hope.

"It will be a powerful lucky thing for us if it has."

As frightened children huddle close together, around the evening fire, at the thought of the dreadful ghost, so these two stern-featured men, whose faces had never blanched when the howls of the myriad red-skins, who were closing around them, sounded in their ears, now instinctively sat closer together, and looked off furtively in the darkness, as if in mortal dread of some coming and appalling monster.

But this sudden exhibition of fear was mostly temporary in its manifestations. As each clutched his trusty rifle, and recalled the terrible weapon of which he was master, their confidence almost, but not entirely, returned.

"If that thing *does* come," finally spoke old Stebbins, in his deliberate but emphatic manner, "and I can get the chance, I'm going to put a rifle-ball into it, smash and clean."

"S'posen it doesn't hurt it."

"That's onpossible."

"Danno," persisted Black Tom, "from what we've heard of it, they say it don't mind our guns."

"Ef it can stand a shot from *my* gun, then thar ain't no use in talking," was the response of the old hunter.

"Don't you mind what Stumpy Sam told us about it?" asked Stebbins, some minutes afterward.

"I didn't hear what he told *you*; you see'd him first."

"It was two years ago, come the middle of trappin' season, when Sam said he and three other fellers see'd him. It warn't a great ways from hyar, and they war riding up one side of a ridge, when jist as they reached the top they met the thing, coming up t'other side. They had a good sight of it and the whole four fired right into it."

"Wal?"

"It give a sort of a snuff, turned tail toward 'em, and walked away, as though they hadn't done nothin' more nor sneeze at it."

"That's Sam's story," replied Tom. "I allers b'lieved he told a thim-b-rin' lie about it, 'cause why, thar ain't *no* animals that could stand four rifle-bullets right into his face."

"That's what I say," assented Stebbins. "Sam and the

rest of them fellers must have been so scared, (though it wouldn't do to tell 'em so,) that they didn't hit the critter at all, and that's what makes me kinder want to draw bead on it, and see what it'll do afterward."

"But I say, Steb., now s'pose you do get a crack at it, and it don't make no difference at all; what then?"

"Why," fairly whispered the old hunter, in his shuddering earnestness, "then I'll know it's a *spook*!"

That was a dreaded word, for it touched the tender point in a brave but ignorant man's character. Strong in the face of real, tangible danger, they were like children before a peril which they could not comprehend.

Both of these hunters had sent their ounce of lead crashing through the heart-strings of the buffalo and grizzly bear, a hundred yards distant, and they were warranted in believing that no living creature could face such "music" and live.

What, then, were they to think of any thing that could bid defiance to their weapons? Was it not natural that they should look upon it as something outside of the world in which they lived—something to be dreaded, as the possessor in itself of a power above and beyond theirs?

They had heard strange stories of a wonderful beast seen by different hunters and trappers, who had visited this portion of the Black Hills. Common report had placed it somewhat further to the north-west, so that when, the year before they had caught a glimpse of it, in sight of the very grove where they were then encamped, they had double cause for amazement.

They had placed these marvelous stories and rumors which reached their ears in the same category, that listeners doubtless often placed theirs, and believed they originated from an encounter with some mis-shapen, malformed brute, that was no more to be feared than the ordinary creatures to be looked for in these wilds, at any time and by any one.

But there came a time when they were most completely undeceived. The preceding spring, when they were returning to the States, and they were heavily laden with furs and peltries, they made their halt for the night in the same grove. They were sitting around the fire, somewhat late at night, as Teddy was sound asleep, when they heard a peculiar harking

sound, and both stole hastily out to the edge of the timber to see what it meant.

As they did so, they saw IT going leisurely toward the ridge, its head being away, and its side partly toward them. Both the hunters identified it on the instant. It was smaller in size than the grizzly bear, but was unlike any creature that either had ever seen. Its appearance, so far as they could judge, allied very well with what they had heard.

It had an immense head, short, thick legs, that moved somewhat clumsily over the ground, and a long, bushy tail, like a squirrel, that was curled over its back, as is frequently seen with that diminutive creature. But the most striking feature about it was its color.

It was a clear night with a faint moon, so that the hunters could not see clearly, but they distinguished the leopard-like spots and zebra-like stripes, that dotted and encircled every part of its head and legs, and on the impulse of the moment, Black Tom raised his rifle and fired at it. He was pretty certain his bullet struck, but if it actually did, the creature paid not the least heed, but moved away at a leisurely gait, and speedily vanished.

Such is an account of the first encounter with the fearful nondescript, which, once seen, could never be forgotten. Since then they had seen nothing of it, although they heard many marvelous stories of it when they reached the settlements on the border.

A full hour had passed since the report of Teddy's gun, and old Sebbins and Black Tom were conversing in their usual way, when they were startled by the sound of rapidly-approaching footsteps, and they had scarcely time to look up, when Teddy dashed up to them, panting and almost breathless.

"What's the matter?" demanded his friends, grasping their rifles and starting to their feet.

"The devil! the devil! I've seen him! I shook hands wid him, and he's comin'!"

"Where? where?"

"There! there!" replied the appalled Irishman, pointing and glancing toward the prairie. "He's comin'; he'll be here in a minute. Blessed Virgin, protect me!"

CHAPTER III.

TEDDY O'DOHERTY'S ENCOUNTERS.

It will be remembered that upon the appearance of the strange animal, during the preceding spring, one member of the party, (Teddy O'Doherty,) was asleep, and failed to see it.

But he heard enough of it continually. It was described and conjectured upon again and again in his hearing, until he came to look upon it as an old acquaintance; but having never set eyes upon it himself, he attached little credit to these numerous accounts, and supposed it was a bear or something similar.

"A peecoolyer-lookin' critter, as everybody observed when they viewed me; but a critter, far all that, that nobody need be afeard of."

So, when a short distance from the camping-ground of his friends, he left them and started in quest of the antelope, he had no thought of the other dreaded creature that had been seen in this region, and that made its home so near at hand.

Passing over the ridge, he found himself in such a heavily wooded country, that he dismounted and continued his hunt on foot. His horse was thus left but a short distance from the camp, and the Irishman understood well enough that he would not increase the distance.

The sun was low in the horizon, but, looking westward, Teddy caught sight of the faint column of smoke that had arrested the attention of old Stebbins. He paused a moment and looked earnestly toward it.

"Red maygurs," he concluded, "and they've squatted down rather close, as Bridget used to observe, when she sat on one side the house in Tipperary, and I on t'other. I will go and introduce myself."

The intervening ground was very favorable for a reconnaissance, and he moved along with little fear of being discovered. It was fully dark when he reached the strange

camp, where not a single person was visible ; but a few minutes examination showed that a large number of Blackfeet Indians had encamped there, but all had been gone several hours.

A little careful examination of the surrounding ground, by means of a torch, showed further that they had mounted their horses and gone due westward, exactly in the opposite direction from their friends, and the very course they would have desired them to take.

This was a pleasing discovery for Teddy, but he was reminded that he had started out to procure a much-needed supper for himself and friends, and that night had closed around him without his having done so.

But good fortune awaited him. This was a country of bountiful game, and the Blackfeet had evidently been feasting, for they had left behind them such an abundance of buffalo-meat and venison, that Teddy found no difficulty in picking up an all-sufficiency for his friends.

To make the load as convenient, however, as possible, he put his share within, making a hearty and enjoyable supper, and made sure that he had secured to his back all that Stebbins and Black Tom could dispose of, and then he started homeward.

In his explorations around the camp fire, he had given it such a stirring up that it was burning vigorously, and threw quite an extended circle of light though the surrounding gloom.

Teddy was standing by the fire, looking in upon the embers, and reflecting how good he felt after his dinner, when it suddenly occurred to him that he was a fine target for any foe that might be lurking in the vicinity.

The thought had scarcely crossed his mind, when he saw something flickering before his eyes ; he heard a whizz, and knew on the instant that an arrow had missed his face by scarce a hand's breadth.

Instinctively he threw his head back, and then jumped back in the darkness.

"Be the Vargin, but that's a *little* too close, as me uncle observed, when by mistake he shaved off his nose, instead of the mustache on his chin. Begorra ; if I kin only get a chance at the spalpeen."

He understood from what direction the deadly missile had come, although he could not tell how far away the Indian stood that had fired it. The Irishman was now enveloped in the gloom of the woods, and his self confidence returned. The experience which had been his with the veteran prairie-men had taught him to move over the ground with the stealth and silence of the Blackfoot himself, and were he so fortunate as to be approaching his treacherous foe, he was certain there was no danger of his betraying himself.

"I'm moving as silent as a fairy," he reflected; "it's a handy thrick fur a chap in my situation—bad luck to it!"

In the darkness his foot caught in a projecting root, and the consequence was, Teddy was thrown forward flat upon his face.

"Bad luck to it!" he repeated, as he hastily scrambled to his feet, "hilloa, there! hold on I say!"

He heard a hurried tramp, and in the gloom caught a glancing glance of an Indian speeding rapidly away from him.

"Howld on, ye dirty coward!" called out the irate Teddy, dashing after him, "howld on, I say, or I'll bate ye, and I'll bate yees if ye do."

It is hardly worth while to say that the Irishman's command was unheeded. The red-skin whisked away, like a flitting phantom, and almost instantly vanished. Teddy pursued him for a short distance, but he was not much of a runner, and his pursuit could not result in any thing but a complete failure.

He was not given time to aim and fire his gun. His "short and decisive campaign" against the Blackfeet was a defeat!

"Bad luck to that rut!" he muttered, as he made his way back to it; "it was all through that!"

He groped around until he discovered the scene of his mishap, when he revenged himself by tearing and ripping the mute offender to pieces.

"It was yees that saved a coward's life!" he exclaimed, as he finished his self-imposed task, "and yees shall never do the likes ag'in."

It may be said that it takes a hungry man to appreciate the same gnawing want in another, and so Teddy almost forgot that he had a couple of friends, something over half a mile distant, who were looking longingly for his coming.

"They kin wait as well as meself," he concluded, when he recalled the fact. "Thru, I have a sooper within, and be the same towken, their sooper is without—but, then, what's the difference?"

However, he concluded that, as the night was now quite well advanced, there was no objection to his rejoining the trappers, and so he started forward.

There was a moon above the tree-tops, and where the country was open he had quite a clear view for a distance of several rods; and, as he recollected very well the route taken in his hunt, there was no fear of his losing his way.

As he moved along, he could see the dark line of the ridge outlined against the sky beyond, and he knew that only a short distance on the other side, his comrades were looking for his coming.

Teddy had a pretty correct idea of the gastronomic capacity of his friends, and so he had loaded himself down pretty heavily with the plunder found around the Blackfoot camp-fire. All that he carried was cooked and prepared, ready for eating.

He was scarcely half-way to the ridge, when he became sensible that he had a very heavy load upon his back; and, coming across a large, flat rock, he sat down upon it for a few minutes' rest.

"Begorra, if the spalpeens ate all of that, it'll do till they reach the States ag'in. Hilloa, there?"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of a man walking in a direction at right angles to his own, and only a rod or two in advance. He was walking leisurely, like some one who was returning from a wearisome hunt; and, what surprised Teddy, he was certainly a white man, rather young in years.

"Hilloa, I say!" called out the Irishman, again.

The stranger abruptly paused, and looked inquiringly toward him.

"Well, what is it ye want?"

"Who the blazes be ye?"

"I don't know as that concerns you," replied the stranger, resuming his walk, and almost immediately disappearing in the darkness.

The exasperated Teddy shouted to him to hold on, calling

him a coward, and seeking by every means imaginable to bring him back. Had it not been that he was so heavily loaded, he would have sought to follow and bring him to terms; but the Irishman scarcely had time to rise to his feet, when the man had vanished.

"Jist me luck!" he growled, as he sunk back again to finish his rest. "I once walked seven miles to attend the wake of Micky McMaghaghoghmoighlan, and whin I got there, found he hadn't died at all; and so, whin I was feileytaterin' meself on a fight wid this impudent spalpeen, he walks away, widout exchanging a crack of the head wid me. Bad luck to him! but I'll have a muss wid somebody, if it's wid old Stebbins or Black Tom, and then I'll be sure to get whopped, which is better nor not fightin' at all, at all."

Teddy was about to resume his walk, when a peculiar sound, something like the bark of a dog, caught his ear.

"What the dooce is that?" he exclaimed, staring about him. "Who's got dogs in this part of the world?"

His inquiry was answered by a sight of the creature itself. He saw a large, clumsy-looking animal, with an immense head and a most frightful looking body, spotted and striped in the most terrible manner, coming straight toward him.

"Begorra! but it's the divil," was the Irishman's conclusion, as he sat like one transfixed, staring at it. "It's the divil himself, dressed up in his bist soot, and going to the circus."

It can not be said that Teddy was particularly frightened, for he had his loaded gun in his possession, and with that he was justified in having confidence in his powers of attack and defense.

But suddenly he recalled the stories he had heard of the strange monster that haunted this portion of the North-West.

"It's worse nor the divil," he muttered, "far it's that, be the howly Vargin!"

This discovery caused the Irishman some little trepidation, but, at the same time, he was rather pleased that he was about to have an opportunity to try his gun upon it.

Indeed, as the nameless beast continued his leisurely advance, his appearance would have struck terror into the heart of any one. The fantastic, extraordinary hue of its body and legs, the immense tail curved over the back, and its ponderous

build, were such that, once seen, no one ever could forget them.

"An' they say he ates min whole," thought Teddy, as he silently drew his rifle around in front of him. "His head is big enough, be the powers! Wonder, now, if he isn't a shark that's immigrating from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

The fearful brute continued his leisurely advance, as if he saw not, or, at least, cared not for the man who was seated almost in his path. His course was such that, if unchanged for a few seconds longer, would lead him about a rod to one side of the amazed hunter.

The latter, as may well be supposed, scrutinized it most sharply as it approached, and under the dim light of the moon, he had a good opportunity to notice its characteristics.

Its head and body have already been described; its short, dumpy legs very much resembled those of an elephant, while, barring the trunk and tusks, its head was not very dissimilar. It had the same immense palm-leaf like ears; but its mouth looked like that of an alligator—so that its cannibal propensities did not seem so unlikely after all.

It moved heavily and somewhat awkwardly, but its appearance was that of an animal of most prodigious strength, much the superior of the famed gizzly bear, and a creature to be shunned in a hand-to-hand encounter.

The idea that would naturally suggest itself upon a glance at this strange creature, would be that it was a cross, combining in itself the characteristics of several animals; but men who had spent years in the West, and understood its native inhabitants thoroughly, declared that such could not be the case. Its build and appearance was unlike any thing that had ever been seen in these parts. It was *sub generis*, and unlike any thing else.

Some believed that it belonged to an extinct race; probably to the era of the mastodon, and other monsters whose remains are found in the earth; that by some strange providence, it had escaped the destruction of its kind, and still wandered over the world, like a lost sheep, looking in vain for its fold—the last and the least of its race.

But this was a fantastic theory—so utterly impossible, that it deserves no more than simple reference here.

There certainly were some established facts regarding this monster which are utterly unaccountable. It had been fired at again and again, by the most skillful hunters, and yet never gave the slightest evidence of being hurt. Bullets that would have bored their way through the hide of the rhinoceros, and torn on through bone and muscle to the seat of life, seemed to glance aside, as harmless as the tiny hailstones.

There was many a man, certainly, who had tried his weapon upon it, and it still walked the earth to defy their skill and efforts. There were hunters who said they had seen it bite a man in two at one mouthful—just as the alligator or shark serve the swimmer that ventures into their domain.

But while we have drifted into this digression, the situation of Teddy O'Doherty has become more and more critical. He sat with his gun in hand, with his eyes fixed upon the brute, waiting for the opportunity to fire.

He had determined that if it headed straight toward him, he would be polite enough to step aside, for *that* certainly was not the antagonist to engage in a close fight; but it did not swerve an inch from its path.

And walking thus, it passed about a rod to the left of Teddy, who cautiously raised his gun and took aim.

What better opportunity was possible? It was so close that he could have toosed his hat upon it, and was turned broadside toward him. If he could stand a shot then, surely he was invulnerable to powder and bullet.

The hunter aimed directly behind the fore leg—that spot which is the vital one to the most dreaded animal, and through which the messenger of death makes his way without challenge. He waited until the foot was thrust forward, and his aim was absolutely certain.

The next instant his piece was discharged.

"Thar! be the Virgin, if that doesn't fetch ye—"

Heavens! what did he hear and see?

He heard that same bark-like cry that had first caught his ear, and saw the brute coming straight toward him!

Flesh and blood could not stand it; and with a howl of terror, Teddy broke in a run for the camp. A few furious bounds carried him to the bottom of the ridge, when his bad luck overtook him.

Glancing back, he saw the dreadful beast close upon him, galloping along like the cat, when frolicking with its prey. The load upon the back of the fugitive made him somewhat awkward in his movements, and he stumbled and fell flat upon his face. Ere he could rise, his foe was upon him!

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEMON AT THE CAMP-FIRE.

TEDDY gave up; he believed it was all over with him. Lying flat on his face, he committed himself to heaven, and waited for the beast to devour him.

Ugh! what a galvanic shudder shook him, as he heard its smothered bark repeated, and felt its hideous nose glide along his body! He felt it thrust beneath his breast, and then the beast gave a lunge, like a hog when rooting, as if seeking to turn him over on his back.

"No; be the powers, you don't," muttered Teddy. "I'm not the chap that's goin to turn over and see meself ate up."

So, instead of turning, he remained flat upon his face, sliding a few inches over the ground.

With a low growl of rage the monster repeated the attempt, and his victim resisted him as before.

Teddy O'Doherty was brave, almost to fearlessness, but this was too much even for him; and, at that point, he swooned away into unconsciousness.

He probably remained in that condition but a short time. When his senses came back to him, he was lying on his back, with his face upturned to the moon. For a few moments, he was naturally enough bewildered, and he lay motionless until it all came back to him. Then he half whispered.

"*'I'm dead and ate up! how qu'ar it seems! I never knew it felt this way. Yis, Teddy, you're ate up!'*"

Gradually a doubt began to filter through his mind, and he moved his hands about his person to see whether he was all there. His load of provisions were shoved from his back, and

lay to one side, while he soon discovered that he was all there and had suffered no physical harm!

Yes; the consciousness finally came to the terrified Irishman that he was still in the land of the living. There was not a wound or scratch upon his person, nor had the food been disturbed, except by the mere act of displacement.

"Begorrah, Teddy O'Doherty, but it's your own mither's son that ye be," he soliloquized, not a little delighted; "but it's so different that ye feel, that ye'll have to have somebody to inthredooce ye to yersilf. I wonder ef that ould craythur is watching fur me."

The Celt cautiously raised his head and looked about him. There was nothing to be seen of the dreaded beast, look in whatever direction he chose.

"Ef it wasn't me that wasn't me, but the baast, then it's mesilf that would be afther ating Teddy O'Doherty, and be the same towken that I haven't, I'm sartin the baast isn't human," concluded Teddy, as he slowly clambered to his feet and furtively glanced about him.

"Thank the good Lord, and the Vargin, that I'm alive!" he exclaimed, gratefully, as he began picking up his provisions again. "I s'pose the craythur wasn't hungry, and when he was pokin' his nose about me, it's likely that he was thrying to pick me pockets."

Filled with wonder at his unaccountable escape from the monster, the Celt began his walk homeward again. He reached and passed up and over the ridge without discovering any thing of his dreaded enemy. Turning aside, he found his horse quietly grazing where he had left him, and, deeming him as safe there as any where else, he permitted him to remain.

He was now within a short distance of the camp of his friends, and was proceeding in his quiet manner when a cold thrill ran through him at the sound of that appalling bark.

Turning his head, he saw the beast on a ridge, coming down the ridge, and scarcely a hundred feet distant.

It was like the explosion of a bomb-shell behind Teddy, and he broke into a wild run, bounding through the timber and up to the camp-fire with the exclamations that have been recorded.

A horde of mounted Blackfeet, or a dozen grizzly bears, could not have created greater consternation. Old Stebbins and Black Tom, as will be remembered, had been conversing about the mysterious creature, and their minds were full of it.

Instantly they leaped to their feet, and stared out in the gloom.

"Whar is he?" demanded Black Tom.

"Close behind me," replied the terrified Irishman, running around to the opposite side of the camp-fire.

"I don't see him—b'ars and bufflers! thar he comes!"

Unconsciously the two trappers took their position side by side. They had stood by each other in many fearful and dangerous scenes, and neither would desert the other at this time.

As Tom spoke, both he and his companion caught sight of the hideous brute, coming through the bushes straight toward them. It was walking quite slowly, and at intervals gave forth that peculiar bark, which had a strange, cavernous sound.

Viewed from the front, its appearance was appalling in the extreme. Its head was of vast size, its mouth in latitude resembled that of the alligator. As it advanced, the firelight shone full in its face, and curiously enough neither of the hunters could discern any thing that resembled eyes, although of course it was sentient.

Very naturally the two trappers had determined to send their messengers into his eyes, satisfied that, if there was nothing superhuman in its make, it could not prove invulnerable to such an attack; but they were unexpectedly deprived of this great advantage, seeing which Black Tom whispered to his companion:

"Aim under the throat, and maybe we'll reach its heart."

No more than a dozen feet separated men and beast, when the former simultaneously drew their guns to their shoulders, took a quick but sure aim and fired.

They might as well have buried their bullets in the solid oak beside them, for all the good that was accomplished. That peculiar bark of the brute may have been caused by the sound as well as by the bullet of the gun.

It stood a moment, as if looking steadily at the men, and then resumed its advance.

This was too much, and with a howl of terror the three men scattered and were up the nearest saplings in a twinkling. Here they felt a certain degree of safety, as it was hardly probable that such a constructed creature could "climb a tree."

"But if he chooses," replied Teddy, from his perch in reply to this remark, "he kin pull up the tree by its roots, and crack our heads together."

Finding himself master of the situation, the mysterious brute took every thing very quietly. Teddy having fastened the meat to his back, had not removed it upon climbing the tree, so that there was nothing on the ground for it to devour; and the trappers were too veteran hunters to fail to carry their weapons with them.

The camp-fire had just been heaped up with fuel, and was now roaring and crackling furiously. The brute seemed to contemplate it a few minutes in quiet wonderment, and then he sat down upon his haunches like a bear, and looked fixedly at the blaze.

"Look at the spalpeen!" called out Teddy. "Did ye ever see sich impudence. He looks as if he owned the grove and us too."

"That's jist 'bout what he does own," replied Black Tom, with grim humor.

"He reminds meself, when I used to sit down in the pratie patch at home, in Tipperary, and think I owned the whole of it, and so I would, if it hadn't been that another chap claimed it."

During these few minutes, all three of the men had been reloading their guns, as best they could in their cramped position. When ready it was arranged that they should all charge their pieces together, at the head of the monster.

This was done, and incredible as it may seem, without result. Struck it undoubtedly was, for it gave a slight twitch with its head, as a dog will do, when pestered with a fly, but it certainly was no more harmed than it would have been by such an insect.

At so short a distance, with such a plain target, it would have

been impossible for the bullets to miss their mark, so that no refuge from the difficulty could be taken in that supposition.

The brute sat motionless a moment, with his gaze upon the burning faggots, and then rising from his sitting position, walked around to the other side of the fire, and took his seat directly under the sapling which was the refuge of Teddy O'Doherty.

"Ye dirthy blaguard, ye needn't come there," he growled, as he looked down at him; "ye're a dirthy dog, as me Bridget used to observe, affectionately, when she saw me comin' in her slanty av Soonday avening."

"He's fell in love with you," remarked Black Tom, who thought he could afford to jest a little, so long as the brute made no active demonstrations against him.

"I guess he's turned watch-dog," said Stebbins, "and is going to keep the other spooks away."

It may be stated that the demonstration which the trappers had just received of the invulnerability of the mysterious creature was complete in every respect. They would have staked anything and every thing that it could have stood without flinching before a battery of columbiads. Under these circumstances, therefore, they did not deem it wise to waste any more powder in firing upon it.

So they reserved their ammunition, and made themselves as comfortable as possible in their elevated position, waiting until it should take it into its head to depart.

"S'pose he stays here a week or two?" said Stebbins.

"Then we must do the same."

"Why didn't we think of the fire?" muttered Black Tom.

"What did yer want to think 'bout *that*?" asked old Stebbins.

"If he don't care for rifle balls, it's likely he's afeard of that. I had only simmed a lot of fire in his face, he'd left."

"Better not try it," returned the elder.

"Why not?"

"Takin' no ways likely it would have hurt him, and he might have cotched you up and slammed you in the fire."

This was a fearful supposition, and all three shuddered at the thought of the brute venting his spite in such a manner.

As it was certain that nothing could be done in the way of

vanquishing the monster, the question now was as to how long he would remain. While he was present, no one could entertain any idea of descending, and if he should take it into his head to spend several days there, there certainly was reason to fear the most serious consequences.

An hour passed and still the brute sat as motionless as a statue. Being several yards from the camp-fire, its dim light gave him a most terrible appearance. The trio kept up a pointless conversation for a long time, Teddy gradually withdrawing from it, until he became silent altogether.

No notice was taken of this fact for some time, until suddenly Black Tom became suspicious and called his name. Receiving no response, he exclaimed, to old Stebbins:

"Buffers and Blackfeet! he's goin' to sleep!"

"If he does he's gone, sure. Wake him up!"

"Teddy! Teddy!" called Tom, "wake up, or you never will."

"Aoogh! what—"

Too late. The Irishman, in his bewilderment, did not comprehend his perilous position, and making an uneasy movement, lost his hold and fell!

And fell in such a manner that he struck full length upon the back of the frightful brute!

A shudder of horror shook the trappers, as they looked down upon what they regarded the certain death of their comrade, who gave a shriek of terror as he rolled like a log helpless to the ground.

The brute started, uttered his sharp, bark-like cry, and then bolted away and vanished in the darkness, without offering to harm the man who lay helpless at his feet.

"Begorra! but he's a gentleman, as Micky Dunn observed of the man that cracked his crown. That's the second time he's give me the go-by, and the next time he does it we'll shake hands and swear we're friends."

"It beats thunder!" exclaimed old Stebbins, who was now prepared to believe Teddy's account of his extraordinary meeting with this animal.

"It can't be that he don't eat men," said Black Tom, "for Stumpy Sam said he see'd it chaw up one of their men."

"I guess he don't like Irishmen."

"It's meself that thinks he does," retorted Teddy, "for he's treated me like a gentleman all the way through."

"Ain't yer going to climb up ag'in?" asked Tom.

"What's the use, when it's more comfortable here, as Micky McFee remarked when he was axed to come out of the gutter."

The Irishman made no attempt to re-climb the tree, although he looked carefully about in every direction in quest of the dreaded creature.

Some fifteen minutes passed and nothing was seen or heard of their dreaded foe, when the hunters, who were excessively hungry, cautiously descended to the ground again.

The first thing done was to replenish the fire, and they determined that if the brute should reappear, they would try the effect of dashing some of the brands in his face.

The next proceeding was to attack the provisions which Teddy had brought back with him, and with such ravenous appetites, they were not long in "throwing themselves outside" of an immense quantity of food.

By this time night was well advanced, but there was no thought of sleep upon the part of any one, excepting Teddy O'Doherty. He had acted as sentinel the night before, and soon became drowsy and stupid.

As he was entitled to rest, he was permitted to stretch out near the fire, with his blanket gathered about him, when he speedily sunk off into utter unconsciousness.

There was some apprehension regarding the horses, and after a while Tom stole away from the fire into the grove to see whether they had been disturbed. Having cropped their fill of the rich herbage they were found asleep, as free from alarm as was the sleeping Teddy O'Doherty.

Added to the terror inspired by the very appearance of the dreaded creature, was that of amazement at the anomalous manner in which it had acted toward the Irishman. Twice it had had him completely in its power, and yet had not harmed a hair of his head.

Why was this? Was it possible that it had really formed a sort of partiality toward Teddy? Such things have been known among wild animals, but it was hardly possible in this case. What, then, could be the explanation?

These were conundrums which the trappers asked themselves repeatedly, and which as repeatedly they were compelled to "give up."

The night wore gradually away, but nothing more was seen of the terrible monster. The camp-fire was kept burning brightly, and the hunters listened attentively for sounds that might betray his approach.

Once or twice a faint rustling of the leaves caused them to start and look affrightedly out in the gloom, but they caught no glimpse of the frightful beast. Accustomed as the hunters were to all manner of exposure and deprivation of sleep and rest, they found no difficulty in keeping their senses about them, even when their bodies were not in motion.

It was a relief to them when the gray mist of morning began stealing through the wood, and they saw the light of another day illuminating wood and prairie.

They seemed to feel scarcely any desire for sleep, and Tom aroused Teddy by giving him a vigorous kick.

"Come, git up! that beast is looking for you!"

"Let him look!" replied Teddy, as he roused himself. "As long as he behaves himself so well I'll be glad to see him."

There remained enough of the provisions brought by Teddy to make a substantial breakfast, after which the horses were brought up and saddled, and in a short time the trappers were on their way toward the north-west.

They had still a short distance to travel before reaching their destination, and while they are thus engaged we will take occasion to refer to a few matters necessary to a full understanding of the incidents that follow.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CANON.

As we have intimated in another place, old Stebbins and Black Tom were veteran trappers who had been in the "profession" a goodly number of years. Both men had families in Independence, Missouri; and, as the incidents we are giving are supposed to have occurred fully a score of years ago, it will be seen that they were engaged in a most dangerous business.

But they had grown so accustomed to its hardships and perils, that when they left home in each autumn, they felt scarcely different from the traveling-agent, who starts upon his tour of several weeks. Both were strongly attached to their wives and children, and were free from the rough, careless habits of dissipation that so often distinguish such men.

In the spring preceding the opening of our story, the two trappers and Teddy O'Doherty were returning homeward with a plentiful supply of peltries, having three horses, besides those they rode, laden down with them, and they were in the highest spirits at the success of their winter's work. Reaching a point a short distance from where we saw them encamped, they halted for the night.

Nothing unusual occurred during the night; but in the morning, when old Stebbins went to a small rivulet near by to drink, he discovered a number of shining particles in the sand, which he instantly recognized as gold. He instituted an examination, and found that in several places it was quite abundant, showing that it would amply repay work. He returned to the camp with the information, when Black Tom came in with confirmatory evidence. Near the spot where his comrade had leaned down to drink, he had accidentally loosened a large, flat stone, which he overturned and found any quantity of the auriferous particles. Putting this and that together, the trio came to the conclusion that they had accidentally struck a "gold mine," and that with care and industry they could easily make their fortune.

The question was then discussed whether they should remain where they were, and follow up the prize that was so nearly in their grasp. Teddy O'Doherty was strongly in favor of it, but the two hunters had families who would look anxiously for them if they overstaid their time, and they had a load of peltries, very valuable, that made the "bird in the hand," and they were anxious to dispose of them before returning upon any other undertaking.

So, after a careful consideration of the matter, it was decided to press on toward the States, to dispose of their stock, and then return to prosecute their search for gold. This was done; but the return of the hunters was much delayed by the sickness of a child of old Stebbins, who was not considered out of danger for several months. Finally, however, it recovered entirely, and the three set out upon what was to prove a most eventful journey.

By this time it was late in summer, and would soon be time for trapping operations to begin. But the three came without their pack-horses, fully determined to devote all their energies to the hunting for gold.

There was the one "lion in their path," the dreaded monster, to which we have made such frequent reference, and which, it will be remembered, was seen by them on their return trip homeward, at the time of the discovery of gold.

Had old Stebbins and Black Tom been single men, it is very doubtful whether the attraction of gold would have been sufficient to lead them into a region that was known to contain such an anomaly; but the prospect of placing their families in easy circumstances for life drew them onward, and thus we find them prosecuting their search for the precious metal in the face of such a hideous monster.

It is not often that a man finds a short and easy road to wealth; and, besides the ever-threatening peril of the beast, they made the unwelcome discovery that there were people in this region ahead of them.

This proved that our friends were not alone in their knowledge of the presence of gold in this secluded part of the world, and it looked no ways improbable that they might encounter serious opposition and trouble from them.

Thus they had the four-legged terror, the Blackfeet, and the

unknown white men to encounter before they could hope to go back to the United States with "coffers filled."

It will be recollected that on the night of Teddy O'Doherty's first encounter with the brute, he saw and spoke to a strange man that passed near him—a stranger who was on foot, and who refused to pause and make known his identity to him.

The presence of this white man, they believed, indicated the presence of others, and it thus behooved our friends to use the utmost circumspection in their movements. They were scarcely a half day's journey from their destination, and it lacked yet an hour or two of noon, when they reined up their horses for what they intended should be the long halt.

Here was capital hunting-grounds, and it was only a few miles beyond this where it was better, and where they had spent several years in the business. There were hills and mountains, rivers, streams, cañons, prairies, woods, and the most romantic diversification of land; there were abundant places where they could approach within a dozen feet of a foe without seeing him.

They knew the ground well, and the wonder was that as gold seemed to be all about them in such abundance, they had never detected the indications of it before.

A secluded place was discovered, where their horses were turned loose to roam free and get themselves in prime condition, while their owners were seeking to put their pockets in the same healthy state.

In a rude, cavern-like structure, made by the jumbling of immense masses of rock together in a remote period of the world, the trappers placed their saddles and luggage, while, carrying their rifles and spades, they set out upon a prospecting tour.

"I wonder if that ar' critter is anywhar 'bout yer," remarked Black Tom, as they moved away together.

"I don't," replied old Stebbins.

"Why not?"

"Because yer he is t'is very minute."

As he spoke, the old hunter pointed upward to the top of a tall, isolated mountain-top above them, and several hundred yards distant. There, in full relief against the blue sky, stood

the beast his ungainly body so strangely striped and ringed, and its appearance so singular as to be almost indescribable.

For a minute the three men looked at it in silence, and then Teddy O'Doherty removed his coonskin cap and made a low obeisance.

"What's that for?" asked Black Tom.

"I salute him, jist as the ginty in Tipperary used to salute me when they saw me ridin' by on me own jackass, that belonged to another man. The beast is a gentleman, so long as he uses me in the shlyle of last night."

"You'd better keep clear of him, so long as you can."

"I shan't bother him, nor persoom too much on his good nature."

"'Sh I thar he goes."

From his high elevation came the faint sound of his peculiar bark, and then the brute turned about, and was immediately lost to view.

"Thar's no tellin' whar he'll next turn up," said Stebbins, as the three moved forward again.

"No; and I don't believe when we meet him again, that we'll get off so easy as before," replied Black Tom.

The gold-hunters were now in a sort of deep cañon or rent in the mountain, through which ran a small a stream of icy-clear water. It was this same rivulet that had displayed the golden particles to old Stebbins, but it was at a point higher up, before it entered into this wild region, and it was now the intention of the three to follow up the stream for a considerable distance, searching it carefully for the same precious metal that had drawn them hither.

In prospecting thus, it was evident that it was necessary to keep a good look-out; and, as Teddy manifested such an appreciation of the nameless brute, that task was assigned to him, while the others were to scrutinize the bed of the small stream for what had caused them to flock in this place.

For several hours the party made their way up the tiny brook without discovering the first indications of gold; yet, they were not discouraged by the fact, for they knew there was plenty of it in the neighborhood.

They had almost reached the spot where they had seen it a few months before, when Stebbins, who was standing in

advance halted, and snuffed the air with the manner of one who scented something suspicious.

"What is it?" asked Black Tom, failing to understand what it meant.

"We're near something dead—hello!"

As he spoke, the old hunter pointed to a clump of bushes that surmounted a mass of rocks and gravel, seemingly without any soil to give them existence. From it a huge bird, large almost to bursting, laboriously rose a few feet in the air, and floated sluggishly down the cañon, a hundred yards or so, when it landed upon a cliff, at a moderate elevation and then stepped heavily around, so as to face and watch the men that had disturbed him.

"That's what it is," said Tom, looking toward the bushes.

The next minute the three moved toward the spot indicated. Their lives had accustomed them to many repulsive and terrible scenes, but all were visibly shocked by what they saw.

It was a magnificently-formed Blackfoot warrior, lying flat upon his back, while the bird had been tearing its meal from his vitals. He had undoubtedly been dead several days, else the odor would not have penetrated so far, but there was no bullet-mark upon his person, so far as the three could see without a more minute examination than any chose to make.

"What killed him?" asked Black Tom.

"The beast," was the instant answer of Teddy.

"What makes you say that?" asked Tom, turning rather sharply upon the Irishman.

"Look how his lid is broke in," replied Teddy, as he pointed downward. "That ar' only two things that could break it in that shtyle."

"Wal, what are they?"

"A shindagh or the baste; and, as there is no one present that can wield the shindagh but your humble servant, Teddy O'Donoghgy, be the same towken it must have bin the baste."

The trappers acquiesced in the decision of their companion, and felt certain that the Blackfoot had been a victim to the fury of the brute that had so terrified them. It was plain that he had been struck a terrible blow on the head and face, a blow that had crushed in his skull as though it were an egg-shell.

Here there was a demonstration of what this fearful creature could do, when excited by anger, and it sent a natural shudder through the whole three.

"I tell yer," said old Stebbins, in a solemn undertone, "it wouldn't take much to turn me back ag'in toward the States."

Black Tom was silent a moment, and then shook his head.

"No; thar's gold around us, and we'll stay long 'nough to git some of it to pay fur comin' hyar."

"I'd ratner have the Blackfeet swarmin' all around, than that ar' single critter."

"So would I; but how you goin' to help it?"

"Kaap with me," said Teddy. "The bastie and meself ar' on the bist of terms, as me Bridget remarked when she threw her parlor sofa (that she used as a boojack) at me last, and by r'ason of me prisence wid yees, ye'll be thrated in the same ilegant shstyle."

All this might be true, but there was little probability of it, and the two trappers were too great veterans in the service to place any reliance upon it. Indeed they believed it would be fatal foolhardiness for the Irishman to trust himself in its power again.

But they saw no remedy except to retreat, and they were not yet prepared for that. So they returned to the brook and resumed their hunt for the goat.

By this time the afternoon was well nigh passed, and little time was left for them to continue their work. They had nigh reached the place where they had discovered the numerous particles the preceding spring, and they passed on until they saw the yellow ore gleaming under the crystal waters, just as it had gleamed there for many a long year.

"Here's some of the stuff any way," said Black Tom, after he had poked a lot in his head and carefully scrutinized it.

"Yes; thar's no mistake 'bout that," replied old Stebbins. "We kin begin work right here, and make more in a day, than in a week by trapping. So, what do yer say? Do we resoom?"

"In the mornin'; we'll take a sleep on it."

Gathering up their implements, they started on their re-

turn. By the time they were fairly in the cañon again it was fully dark, and, walled in as they were on either hand by such high, rocky cliffs, the darkness became so profound that they could scarcely see a step before them.

But they remembered the route too well to go astray and they moved cautiously but unhesitatingly forward in the direction of the cavern that they had selected for their home, while at work in this region.

At the upper end of the cañon, indeed before it narrowed enough really to deserve the name, there was a mass of trees and undergrowth, through which the three hunters were making their way, when Black Tom uttered his low, sad len "sh!" of alarm.

The others paused and listened, and looked around to learn the cause of this signal of their companion.

Like the faint twinkle of a star low down in the horizon, the three caught the glimmer of a camp-fire in this mass of vegetation and undergrowth.

"I knowed thar war others 'bout," said Black Tom, after a moment's pause; "whether they're red or white-skins, we can't tell till we find out."

"Let's do it," said old Stebbins, and simultaneously the three set out toward the point of light, moving in the stealthy, silent manner that had become almost a second nature to them; but they had not gone far when Tom paused and said:

"Go ahead and I'arn what yer can, and I'll go down to the cavern and wait for ye. Thar's no need of all of us goin' there."

The trapper moved away from them as he spoke, not waiting to hear their opinions; and, as each party met with a curious adventure very shortly after, we will proceed to give them in detail.

CHAPTER VI.

BLACK TOM'S ADVENTURE.

Old STEBBINS and Telly O'Doherty crawled carefully over the rocks and boulders until they were near enough to get an unobstructed view of the camp-fire, when they paused somewhat astonished.

Instead of seeing Blackfoot Indians or miners, as they expected, they descried a single man reclining before the fire, gazing dreamily into the embers, as though lost in reverie. He held a long, beautiful rifle in easy grasp, but there were no signs of any meal in preparation, or of any thing that was likely to engage his attention.

He was dressed in a sort of sportsman's costume, with his pants thrust into high, well fitting boots, and he was unquestionably handsome, with fine, regular features, although the lower part of his face was concealed by a luxuriant auburn beard.

"The same gentleman that addressed me so politely last night," exclaimed Telly, in a whisper, although it will be seen that, when this interview took place, the Irishman was denied a view of the features of the stranger, so that this assertion was more of a guess than any thing else.

The question now was, whether they should go forward and make the acquaintance of this stranger, or quietly withdraw and leave him to his musings. As they were engaged in the hunt for gold, it was not very desirable to have any new partners than they already had, and so, after a short and confidential conference, the hunters stealthily made their way back to the cañon, and continued their way down it until they reached "head-quarters."

Every thing here was found as they had left it, but there were no signs of Black Tom.

"Where can he be?" was the question they asked of each other, and, as hour after hour passed away, they could do nothing but conjecture the cause of his absence. As they lay

heard no shout or discharge of gun, they hoped that nothing serious had befallen him.

At a late hour the two lay down, and slept until morning, and when they rose with the break of day, their friend was still missing; but, to their inexpressible relief, he came upon the stage of action in the course of an hour.

"Dance and batters?" he exclaimed, in answer to their questions; "but this is a little the queerest place I ever got in. What do you spose I've been doin'?"

"Makin' a fool of yourself," replied old Stebbins.

"No need of that, when I've got a couple handy, always," retorted Black Tom; "but what do you think it was?"

"Dancing the Donnybrook jig," replied Telly. "Ye might've got some old she-bear, or the baste fur yer partner; yees would be a fine couple, and well matched."

"No, sir; *I've been chasin' a gal!*"

"Did ye catch her?"

"No, 'cause I daresn't."

The trapper was in earnest, and here is the experience he gave:

After separating from his friends, on the preceding evening, he had quietly pursued his way down the cañon, and had nearly reached his home, when he heard the tramp of a horse, near at hand. The darkness was so great that he could see nothing, but he knew the horse was coming directly toward him; so he stepped to one side and allowed it to pass.

The horse snuffed, and showed some uneasiness, proving that he was aware of the personality of some one, but he continued steadily onward, and passed by.

"I'll follow and I'll earn somethin' 'bout yer," concluded the trapper, as he moved silently behind the animal, that could be only followed by the sound of its hoofs.

A short distance on the animal turned off into what might be termed a back-canyon, looking off at a sharp angle from the main cañon, and Stebbins and Telly at that moment. In fact, the hunters had observed through the day that there were several entrances into the cañon in which they had chosen to make their quarters for the time.

In the course of half an hour the gradual rising of the ground brought them upon the prairie. As the horse stopped

upon the high and temporarily level ground, it was brought in full relief against the sky, the trapper standing somewhat below it, so that it and its rider were outlined against the faintly-lit sky, as if drawn in ink.

What was Black Tom's amazement, when he saw at this moment that the rider was a woman, with an Indian shawl thrown around her shoulders! As if she suspected that some one was near her, she partly turned her head, at the instant her animal stepped upon the prairie, so that the profile of her face was plainly seen.

"Skulp me! ef she ain't a white woman!" fairly gasped the trapper, who could scarcely credit his senses. "What is *she* doin' hyar?"

There was something in this scene that prevented Black Tom from calling to her, as he would have done had the circumstances been different. He recalled that he was in the region where the supernatural beast had been seen, and a cold shudder went through him as he reflected that perhaps he was following a *spirit* instead of a mortal.

He hesitated a moment, but he had his share of curiosity, and it struck him that he might not again have so good an opportunity of learning something that very probably concerned the welfare of himself and his companions.

So the next instant he had resumed his pursuit, moving with the silence of a phantom close behind the horse, that never halted, but walked with a proud step, as if conscious he carried a royal burden.

Black Tom had no difficulty in keeping up with the two, but he was uncertain whether the lady knew she was followed or not. When on the open ground, there was sufficient light to gain quite a distinct view of her, although it was by no means a satisfactory one.

The country was very much broken. As we have said, it was cut up by hills, ravines, cañons, streams and open prairie—but there were paths leading through these in different directions, mostly made by animals, so that no one ever need encounter any difficulty in making his way from one point to another.

The horse with the unknown lady continued forward with that unhesitating gait which showed how certain he was of his way, and that his rider had no fear of his going away.

"Skulp me! but this is a qu'ar business I've gone in!" muttered the trapper, as he skulked along behind the animal; "but I'll follow till I find out something."

The way became more broken, but the noble brute kept up his steady, unswerving gait the same as on the open prairie. As near as Black Tom could judge they had gone about five miles, and were ranging along the mountain-side, when he caught the glow of a light directly in front of the girl, and towards which she was manifestly traveling.

"Now I shall soon know something," he muttered, as he saw the beacon, and allowed the distance between them somewhat to increase.

It was not long before he made the discovery that there was an Indian village ahead. He was not a little surprised at this, as he had never known of a tribe having their settlement in this place. Still his surprise vanished in a great degree when he recalled the well-known nomadic habits of all red-skins, and remembered that he had never been in this precise place before, although he had frequently passed so near it.

He made as thorough a reconnoissance as possible, and learned that the village was a very small one, numbering scarcely over twenty lodges. The darkness, however, did not conceal the fact that they were much better and more substantially built than was common among the Indians, from which it followed that if these were Blackfeet, they were a select branch which did not mingle with the principal tribe.

When this little village was reached, the unknown lady vanished from view. She seemed to ride directly among the lodges, where some one probably took charge of her animal, and she went to her owl home.

Black Tom tarried some time, but learned little more. He saw lights glimmering dimly through the skins of which the lodges were composed, and he could hear the subdued ramble of voices within. At first he intended to steal his way among the lodges; but, as there was nothing particular to be gained by so doing, he refrained.

The greater part of the night was consumed, and Tom hastened forward, feeling that he had need of sleep, as he had been deprived of it altogether the night before. He kept to the track in returning, and entered the mouth of the cañon

where his friends were, when he detected the twinkle of the same camp-fire that had aroused their notice, and which he had failed to see when so intently following the lady on her horse.

"I may as well make a night of it," muttered Tom, as he halted a moment and looked in that direction, "and whoever owns that 'ere 'stablishment has squatted so near ours that we orter shake hands."

Stealing forward in the same stealthy manner, he came in sight of the young man whom we have already described, and who, although several hours had elapsed, still sat gazing into the embers with the same absent, dreamy expression that old Stebbins and Teddy observed. He had doubtless replenished his fire since then, as it was burning quite vigorously, but he had returned to the deep reverie that first distinguished him.

"Wal, now, that's what I call quite careless," muttered the trapper; "thar seems to be plenty of white folks in these parts; wonder if we are in a civilized country arter all."

Black Tom looked at the young man a moment and then concluded to go forward and make his acquaintance.

"He don't look like a fool if he does act like one," thought he, "he looks to me like a chap that's got a love fit string. I've been through that mill myself, and know something about it. Wouldn't it be qu'ar, now, if he should be in love with the gal I see'd on horseback?"

Perhaps not so strange after all, when every thing should become known.

"I'll see what kind of a watch he's keeping."

With which Black Tom reached out, and taking hold of a twig, snapped it so quickly that it made quite a sharp noise.

Quick as lightning, the stranger sprang to his feet, and darted back in the darkness.

"That's done pretty well," concluded the trapper, not a little pleased at the movement.

"Who's there?" demanded the young man, in a rich bass voice.

"A friend," was the instant reply.

"Come forward, then, and show yourself."

"Hyar I am!" replied Tom, as he stepped forward in the light of the camp-fire, and waited for the stranger to show himself.

"And I am glad to see you. My name is Hammond—Fred Hammond, and I am pleased to meet you."

These words of welcome were uttered as the tall, graceful form of the speaker moved forward, and he reached out his hand and grasped the hard palm of the hunter.

Black Tom looked significantly around him.

"What's the matter?" asked Hammond, with a smile.

"Suppose it had been a red skin instead of Black Tom that crept up to you in that style, the crack of the twig would have been the crack of a rifle, and that would have been the last of Fred Hammond."

"It looked foolhardy, I'll admit," said he, with a laugh, "but then it wasn't, after all. There is no danger of either you or me being disturbed by Indians to-night."

"How do you know so much 'bout the red-skins in these parts?" asked the trapper, in some surprise.

"I've been here several months, and during that time I ought to have learned something, had I not?" he returned, with a smile.

"Well, I tell yer what I know," added the trapper, earnestly, "thar ar' red-skins in a few miles of hyar."

Black Tom noticed how his companion started, as he instantly asked:

"How do you know that?"

"'Cause I've seen 'em—since the sun went down, too."

"Where?"

"Off yonder," replied Tom, pointing in the direction of the village, "I see'd a white a gal on a horse and I just follered and watched her."

The period gloom in which the two men sat, nor the luxuriant whiskers, could not conceal the flush that overspread Hammond's face at the utterance of these words.

"Where did you see her?" he asked, making a great effort to hide his deep interest.

"Way she rid up out the canyon, and I follered arter her."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No, she didn't seem to notice me, so I didn't offer to shake hands."

"Strange!" exclaimed Hammond, as if musing with him-

self, and then he was about sinking into a reverie, when Black Tom aroused him.

"See yer, Hammond, as I b'leve you call yourself, that seems to be something in this gold that interests you. Ain't that so now?"

"Well, I see no objection to confessing that there is."

"Who is she?"

"I can not say. You are right in supposing that she is a white girl. She is of our own race and blood, and is a prisoner, although a not very unwilling one, among a small tribe of Indians near at hand."

Black Tom was somewhat pleased with Hammond; he had that admiration for a learned man which the ignorant invariably feel, and he saw from the manner of his speaking that he was a "scholar." Besides that he possessed a bluntness of manner that predisposed all in his favor—but, at the same time, he was not prepared as yet to invite him to make one of their party.

There was a mystery, which the trapper was desirous to penetrate, and with characteristic bluntness he put his questions point-blank.

"What brings yer in this part of the country?"

Hammond looked at him rather quizzically; the movement of his whiskers showed that he was smiling.

"It is *not* the object that brings *you* and your companions here."

"What do you know 'bout that?"

"All."

"What is it?"

"Gold."

"Wal, you're right—no use denyin' that—but, how do you know it, Hammond? That's what I'd like to know."

"Why, my dear fellow, I know that you and two comrades have taken up your head quarters down the cañon; I know also that there is gold here. All that remains for me to do, is to put this and that together."

"Wal, you ain't nobody's fool," returned the trapper after a moment's pause, "but I don't know, arter all, how a fool could have told that. Ain't you huntin' arter gold—now, honest—no foolin'."

"No, sir," was the response.

"Why ain't yer?"

Hammond laughed quite heartily before he answered:

"Your questions are rather pointed, Tom, and such as I deem too pointed you will permit me to decline answering."

"Surely; you needn't answer any, if they don't suit you."

"I am aware of that, Tom; therefore, I am not hunting for gold for the simple reason that I don't need it. There is considerable of the precious metal about here, but it can only be obtained by hard labor, and when I am at home I am in comfortable circumstances. Is that satisfactory, Tom?"

"Yas. Wal, I'm poor, and so are all the chaps that be with me, and we think we see a chance to better ourselves."

"So you do; go ahead and you will do well enough."

"You've been here several months?"

"Yes; during most of the season."

"And hasn't huntin' arter gold?"

"Not at all."

"See yer," suddenly exclaimed Black Tom, "have you seen any thing of that striped and speckled critter that chaws up red-skins whole?"

"I know the animal to which you refer," replied Hammond, more seriously. "I have seen it more than once."

"Did it ever hurt yer?"

"I don't look dangerously hurt, do I?" laughed Hammond, as he surveyed his own person, as if searching for grievous wounds. "No; it has never harmed me, but it *has* killed many a one."

"Don't you know nothin' 'bout it?"

"Haven't I told you enough?"

This was evasive, but it answered the purpose for which it was uttered. Hammond knew a great deal about this animal and its creature. Indeed, had he chosen, he could have told the truth regarding it—a most wonderful secret, which the reader shall learn in due time.

But his lips were sealed. He had not the right to tell what he knew—not yet. The time might come when he could tell all, but, for the present, he must remain mute.

"It beats any thin' I ever heard tell of," said the trapper, talking to himself. "I b'lieve it's a spook."

"See here," said Hammond, looking up in his tank, in a plain manner, "you seem to to be a good, honest soul, and I will tell you something, confidentially. You are wondering why I am in this out-of-the-way part of the world, and I reply that I am seeking not gold, but what is far above gold and pearls—and that is the lady you saw on horseback to-night!"

CHAPTER VII.

GOLD!

"I b'lieve I'll dig out of these parts," said Black Tom, with a sigh, after he had heard the explanation of Fred Hammond.

"Why so?" quietly asked the latter.

"Things don't look right to me; I don't understand 'bout that speckled critter, nor 'bout the critter I've seen on the kenyon on horseback. I b'lieve *she's* a sperit."

"No; she's as much flesh and blood as you are. I have spoken to her."

"Have you axed her to dig out of these parts?"

"I have, more than once."

"Why don't she do it?"

"We'll let the answer to that question remain in abeyance for the present," was the graceful response of Hammond. "I think she will do so, but the time has not yet come for such an important step to be taken."

"Let me ax you something else, then. Do them Blackfeet where she's stayin' *blong* *thair*?"

"They have lived there a long time, and no doubt expect to remain there for a long time to come, but they do not belong to the Blackfeet tribe."

"What tribe, then?"

"They are the Meagans."

"I've heard tell of them, years ago, but I thought they were all dead."

"They were once a powerful tribe, and now they are all dead."

are left of them, scarcely a hundred souls. You know they are *Christians*."

Black Tom did not know that, nor did he know any thing of them, except that such a tribe had once been a power in the West, but he had supposed hitherto that they had vanished from the earth long since.

"They have been Christianized through the efforts of the good Moravian missionaries," continued Hammond, "and they live a quiet, unobtrusive life among themselves, disturbing nobody, and desirous of being left alone by all who pass through this region."

"What is the gal doing with them?"

"Suppose we drop all reference to her for the present," was the pleasant reply of his companion; "you are here for the purpose of hunting gold, and I must warn you not to interfere with the Meagans."

"We won't hurt them if they let us alone," was the sturdy reply of the trapper, "but they must keep their hands off."

"They won't be likely to disturb you, although they do not like the presence of any one in these parts."

"Why don't they?"

"Because they are aware of the existence of gold, and they know if that fact becomes generally known, they will have to pack up and leave."

"Be that any other white men besides us hyar?"

"Quite a number have passed through, but I don't think there are any besides your company."

"The Blackfeet are here sometimes?"

"Yes; their hunting and war parties occasionally pass through, but they know of the Meagans, respect their character, and never offer to molest them."

"I see; but how 'bout us?" asked Black Tom, with a grin.

"It ain't likely they would be so careful about troubling on your corns. Heigho!"

This exclamation on the part of Hammond was caused by the growing light around them showing that day was breaking. The trapper was startled somewhat, but he was deeply interested in his new acquaintance, and continued chatting some time longer. As he was ready to move away Tom said:

" See hyar, Hammond, our mansion is down near t'other end the kenyon, and—"

" I know very well where it is," interrupted the young man bowing slightly and smiling.

" Wal, what I war goin' to hit at war this: come thar and make your head-quarters with us. We're huntin' gold and you are huntin' the gal; but we've got to do a little sleepin' now and then, an' why can't you bunk with us?"

" I thank you, Tom; I may accept your invitation, but no just at present. However, we will keep up the acquaintance so pleasantly commenced, and I will call on you now and then.

This was their parting, and making their way out of the bushes, Black Tom continued on down the cañon, reaching his friends, when both were quite anxious regarding him.

After telling his story, there was a consultation. All were quite hungry, and it was agreed that old Stebbins should start off on a quest for food, and Teddy should keep guard during his absence, which time Black Tom proposed to devote to sleep.

This arrangement was carried out to the letter. Tom secured two good hours' rest, which, were all that he needed, Teddy acted faithfully his part as sentinel, and old Stebbins came back with the hind-quarters of a young antelope slung over his shoulder.

Some was broiled over the fire, and the three hunters devoured it with an appetite that was absolutely wolfish, scarcely speaking until it was finished, when Tom asked, somewhat bluntly:

" Did you see nothin' of the speckled and ring-tailed critter?"

" Nothin', but I see'd sign."

" Blazes! whar?"

" Off yender."

As he replied he pointed off to the left, which was in a totally different direction from the one leading toward the Mexican village, proof that they were lost in the forest.

" Thar's 'bout a dozen," added old Stebbins. " They're Blackfeet in thar war-paint, and they're just for the killin'."

" Bad 'cess to 'em!" exclaimed Teddy, who had managed to

light his pipe. "Give us the chance and we'll show 'em a thing or two."

The matter was discussed pro and con, when it was agreed that the three should separate and take different directions. Each of the three were to search for gold and Indians. By this means there was a better prospect of finding the precious metal than if they went in company, and if danger from the Blackfoot threatened, there was scarcely a possibility that it would escape the vigilance of all three.

Old Stebbins took somewhat the same route that he followed in his morning hunt, his principal purpose being to look out for Blackfoot. Telly went up the brook, his object being gold, while Black Tom, after getting clear of the cañon, diverged to the right, his purpose being both.

Leaving the two former to themselves for the present, it becomes necessary once more to follow the adventures of Black Tom.

His course led him across a short space of open prairie, when he entered a wild section, better fitted for the habitations of the chamois or mountain goat, than for any other animal.

He was constantly passing around deep chasms, climbing rocks, clambering through bushes, sometimes leaving the debris and loose stones rattling behind him, with a noise that was startling, until he found himself in a small, narrow valley, through which ran a stream somewhat larger than the one in the cañon that he had left a short time before.

The trapper carefully surveyed the bluffs and elevated points surrounding him, but all was as quiet as at "creation's morn." Not even the cry of a bird, or the whirr of its wing broke the impressive stillness of the solitude.

Tom was somewhat affected by the grand solemnity of the scene around him, and he stood a moment leaning upon his rifle, silent and thoughtful, swayed by those reverential emotions which, at times, come over the most ignorant of mankind.

While standing thus with his eyes fixed upon the ascending side of the valley, he was startled by seeing the loose dirt and stones, directly beneath a clump of bushes, rattle down the declivity, as though they had been dislodged by the foot of some person or animal.

The trapper was on the alert instantly. His eagle eye was fixed upon the bushes, with the sharp, penetrating glance of suspicion; but the vegetation was too dense and luxuriant for him to discover whether there was any thing beneath them or not.

"Wonder ef that was a Blackfoot," he muttered, as he held his rifle ready for use at a second's warning. "Some unfounded varmint like as not is follerin' me. I'll see ef I can."

Raising his gun to his shoulder, he aimed directly at the center of the bushes and discharged it. No response followed, not even the rattling of an additional pellet. All remained as quiet and motionless as before the disturbance took place.

This almost convinced the trapper that there was no man or animal concealed there. Even had he not hit him with his bullet, the shot itself would have caused a movement that would have loosened the debris again.

"I guess the thing done itself," he concluded, as he reloaded his piece, and scrutinized a moment or two longer.

As he moved away, he occasionally turned his head and glanced back, but saw nothing to renew his suspicions, and by the time he had passed a hundred yards down the valley, he had come to the opinion that there was but one eye that was surveying his movements—and that was the eye that looked upon him in kindness and mercy, as it does upon all mortals.

Still no signs of gold.

He was now following the course of the stream down the valley. In some places it brawled over stones, with a noise that shut out all other sounds, and then it flowed calmly and still, like the current of a deep river.

It was of crystal clearness, and there was no place where he could not distinguish the bottom, as easily as though it were "liquid air" flowing at his feet.

"Wonder ef there's any use ef my waddin' in there, turnin' over them stones, and lookin' under them—"

Suddenly he paused. What did he see?

He looked carefully a moment, and his heart gave a jump, as he plainly distinguished something yellow gleaming in the corner of the bed. The next instant he had plunged into the

stream, which was about a foot in depth, and thrusting his arm down, brought it to the surface and held it up to view.

Yes: it was a solid lump of pure gold!

Black Tom was certain of it. It was about the size of a hen's egg, very heavy, and bright and glistening. There could be no doubt of its nature.

He waded ashore again, and then "hefted" it, turned it over and over, tossed it in the air, caught it, smelled of it, put his tongue to it, and was delighted.

Why should he not be delighted? Was not this what had brought him to this region? Was it not worth more than many days' labor of trapping?

"That's the fast crop!" he exclaimed, as he carefully put it away about his person; "and it follows that thar must be more of the same sort 'bout hyar."

The day was quite cool, and he was pretty wet; but he felt it not. His feelings were excited, and he was tenfold more anxious for the precious metal than he had ever been before. It seemed as if there was an all-controlling appetite that had hitherto been latent, that was now aroused to action, and that overcame every other emotion.

He thought nothing now of personal danger. Gold, gold, was his thirst, and it led him on in his eager search.

The trapper walked along the edge of the stream, totally oblivious to every thing but the one thing that just then occupied his thoughts, to the exclusion of every thing else.

Several minutes passed thus, when he was aroused from this condition by a sharp voice, calling almost in his very ears:

"Hello there!" Starting back, Tom looked up and saw Fred Hammond standing a few feet in front of him.

"What's the matter?" asked the hunter.

"You must get out of here, without a moment's delay!"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Tom, staring about him as though he had just awakened to a sense of his perilous condition.

"The Blackfeet are after you."

"Where?"

"Everywhere," replied Hammond, somewhat excitedly; "there are two or three camps up the stream, and several

coming down. They are trying to surround you, and if you remain here five minutes longer, you are a dead man."

"I ain't killed quite so easy as that," said Tom, somewhat sullenly. "If there ar' any red-skins that ar' goin' to make a dead man of me, jest fetch 'em along; that's what's the matter."

"Follow me, and don't wait an instant," commanded Hammond, fairly seizing upon him.

Instead of running either up or down-stream, the young man led the way to the high, steep side of the valley, which was thickly wooded, and extended full five hundred feet upward from where they stood.

Up this the two bounded like goats, half crawling and climbing through the wood and undergrowth, until, panting and almost exhausted, they reached the high ground above, where they paused awhile to gain their breath before proceeding further in this dangerous territory.

They had penetrated such a distance that they were effectually concealed from the view of whatever Indians there might be in the valley below, although, of course, the redskins could easily follow their trail.

They stood a moment in silence, and then, when they had recovered their breath, Hammond placed his hand familiarly upon the shoulder of the trapper, and said, earnestly and kindly:

"Tom, you are an old hunter, and know more of the red-men and their ways than I do, but that doesn't signify that you are in no need of counsel. I was wandering through this section, when I discovered your danger. It was not the situation of your body, so much as it was the condition of your mind. You had found gold, and were so excited over it, that a Blackfoot might have slipped up behind and tomahawked you. I saw it, and I got you up here, that you might recover your senses. There is gold down there—plenty of it; look carefully and you will find, but don't look down all the while—LOOK UP!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVERS.

HAMMOND felt that he had done his duty. He had awakened the trapper to a sense of his personal danger, and that was enough. Without waiting for his reply, he moved rapidly away, taking a direction that led toward the Meagan village.

When he had gone a few hundred yards, a close scrutiny would have revealed that he was following a path—a very slight one, it is true, but still sufficiently defined to show that it was familiar to him.

On he walked, until he had traversed fully a mile, when he paused and began carefully to examine the bushes that overhung the path. Suddenly, he found a leaf that was twisted in a peculiar manner, and instantly his face brightened.

"She is coming! she is coming!" he exclaimed, to himself, after he had carefully examined it a moment.

The words were yet in his mouth, when a light footstep was heard, and the next instant a rare vision burst upon him.

She did not appear to be over twenty years of age at the most, and she was as beautiful as an Oriental dream. Her cheeks had the tint of the pearl, her hair was abundant, of glossy blackness, confined by a red band at the neck; her features were faultlessly regular, her eyes dark and lustrous, her form rounded and perfect, while the half-Indian dress, with its brilliant and varied colors, set her figure off to the best advantage.

Over all there was that indescribable charm of perfect physical health—that charm which makes the homely handsome, without which the most perfect features lack fascination, and which, when added to the handsome woman, places her upon the very pinnacle of female loveliness.

She came forward somewhat timidly, while Hammond, his face aglow with happiness, hurried toward to meet her. Seizing one of her hands in both of his, he pressed it warmly, and exclaimed, in the low, sweet voice of fervent love:

"Lamora, you have granted my prayer; you have come again; you have allowed me to see you."

"Yes," she replied, in a low, sweet voice, "you know that Lamora is your friend."

"I hope she is more than that."

"No, no."

Her eyes were upon the ground and she shook her head with an indescribable sadness in her manner.

She was a white woman; she spoke the English language fluently, and she seemed to understand her own race. She was modest and reserved, and although one might reasonably suspect that she felt no little interest in Hannon, yet it was no blind, reckless passion, such as an ignorant person sometimes shows, but a pure, maidenly emotion.

"Lamora," said the lover, still holding her hand and looking tenderly down in her face, "you are a white person of the same blood as myself; you live among the Indians; do you not wish to return to your own kindred?"

"Why should I?" she returned, in the same sorrowful voice. "I do not know that I have any relations living; I have almost forgotten their names. I have no one but a father, and he has long since forgotten that he had a child stolen by the Indians."

"How old were you when you were taken away?"

"I could not have been more than five years."

"How is it that you speak English so well?"

Lamora looked up in surprise.

"My tribe use the language, more than their own tongue."

"Was it the Merjans that stole you?"

"No; *they* would not do such a thing. I was stolen by the Sioux, shortly after my father had emigrated to the West. They killed my mother and sisters and brothers, but father escaped, and I was carried away captive."

"How did you learn all this?"

"Kippen, who is the chief of our tribe, and who is my adopted father, rescued me of the Sioux when I was a child, and from him he got the particulars of my misfortune."

Hannon was silent a moment, as if in doubt about the question trembling upon his tongue, but he uttered it.

"Have you yourself no recollection of that terrible time?"

"Yes, I remember it well. It was a fearful experience indeed, but it was so long since that I can think upon it, without the shuddering you would suppose I ought to feel. I remember the long ride in the emigrant wagon—the halt in the woods—the cutting down of the trees—the building of the cabin—the howling of the wolves at night—my sports with my brothers and sisters by the brook that ran near the house—the dark night when we were all awakened from sleep by the whoops of Indians—the burning of the cabin—the trembling of my mother as she threw herself between her children who were huddling together in terror—the slaying of them—the brave but useless fight my father made—how I was then caught up in the arms of a savage and borne away in the dark woods. Oh, it was a dreadful sight!"

And in spite of what Lamora had said, her feelings overcame her, and she sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

Her lover was silent out of respect and sympathy for her, until she had regained her self-command in a degree, when he said in the kindest of tones:

"It was cruel in me to call up the remembrance; will you forgive me?"

"It is past now," she replied. "Then follows a summer in an Indian village on the shore of some great lake, where I was treated harshly, and then, one day, Kipwan, an old man, and a Christian Indian, came to the village, and when he went away he took me with him on his horse. We rode a long distance until we reached his tribe, where I staid until I was quite a girl, when they moved a great way westward to this place, where we have been ever since."

"And during all this time, did you feel no longing to return to your father?"

"Yes; and I shed many tears, but I was treated with great kindness, and the longing gradually wore away until it entirely disappeared."

"Entirely so?"

"Yes, entirely."

"And do you think you can be content to spend the remainder of your life among those Indians, and finally to die there?"

"Why not? I have no enemies; they are all my friends."

"I do not doubt that; but they are savage and you are civilized; they are of one race and you of another."

"It is a difference to you but none to me," she said, sorrowfully. "Nowhere else could I find such friends as there?"

"Do you doubt me, dearest Lamora? Do you not believe that I love you? that I am yours, heart and soul? Tell me, do you think I am deceiving you?"

Her head drooped still lower, but she replied distinctly:

"No; I do not think you would do that."

"Then do not doubt me; I will take you to my own home; you shall be mine and I shall be yours; there is nothing that love can do for you that shall not be done. Can you not be happy in my love?"

She was silent a few moments, as if too much affected to speak. Hammond truly and deeply loved this girl, and had all the eagerness of a young lover to carry away the prize with him. He had spent several months here, held solely by the magnetism of her presence.

We have described in the first chapter his singular meeting with her, and the deep impression her appearance and her act of kindness had made upon him. True to his declaration, he had left his companions, and had devoted all to searching her out. He knew that she dwelt somewhere in this neighborhood, but it was a long time before he could discover her.

Seemingly by pure accident he had encountered her a few days before. As may be supposed, she was greatly surprised to see him, and their first interview was quite embarrassing upon both sides.

But their acquaintance rapidly progressed, until we have shown how he learned much regarding her early history, and finally declared his love to her.

It was plain, and Hammond saw that he had awakened a tender interest in her, but she had not yet reached the point of giving her love unreservedly to him. She was strongly attached to Kipwan and her Mergon friends, and it was a painful struggle for her to decide to leave them forever.

"You have grown up among the people who have treated you kindly, and to whom you feel devotedly attached. It is

natural that you should ; I love them because of their kindness to you ; but you are fitted for another life than this ; go with me, and you shall never regret the step."

Hitherto the two had been standing, but now Hammond conducted her some distance from the path to a flat rock, where the two seated themselves.

It was a bright sunny day ; they were enveloped in shrubbery and undergrowth, which were so dense about them, that they were invisible to any one a short distance away.

They sat in silence for a few moments ; their hearts too full for speech. *She* was thinking how much she loved the noble figure beside her : how happy she could be to yield her heart to him, and to go where she could be wholly his. But—

"Can I ? Is it best ? Heaven direct me !"

She prayed earnestly for guidance, for, like the simple-minded people among whom she dwelt, she was a devout believer in the protecting care of heaven.

It was hard for her to decide, and still the struggle went on.

Hammond was partly sitting and reclining, and now and then gazing up in the face of the maid beside him. It seemed to him that with each look the wonderful loveliness of her face increased.

"She is beautiful—surpassingly beautiful," he thought, as he looked, returning again and again to feast upon the vision. "No one can help admiring her ; no one can deny that she is faultless in form and feature, and yet it is not *that* alone which has drawn me toward her. She is devoutly religious, good, and with a heart of the tenderest sympathy. I *must* have her ; I can not live without her."

"Yes, Lamora," said he, sitting upright, and drawing her to him, "you must go home with me ; you must be my wife ; you will find nothing but kindness awaiting you ; you will have the heart of your lover forever. You must ; you shall go."

The beautiful head, with its wealth of black hair, was now resting unresistingly upon his shoulder. He gently raised it, and imprinted a kiss upon the warm cheek.

"Answer me, Lamora," he said, in the gentlest of voices, "do you love me, or do you feel indifferent toward me?"

"*I love you ; I can not help it !*"

"Heaven bless you ! who wants you to help it ?" exclaimed the delighted Hammond, as he rained his kisses, and she smiled through her tears, and showed how perfect her happiness was, in confessing her love.

"Lamora, will you be mine? Will you go home with me?"

She looked at him unflinchingly in the face, and a seraphic light seemed to suffuse her eyes and countenance as she answered:

"Yes, I will go to your home with you and be yours."

"Ah ! who on earth does not envy me !" exclaimed the overjoyed lover. "You are mine ; your promise is given. You feel no regrets?"

"No ; none at all," she answered, with the same bewitching sweetness.

"I thank Providence for this," said Hammond, fervently. "You have intrusted your happiness into my hands, and never, no, *never* shall you regret it."

Ah ! they were happy moments to both. It was "love's young dream," in all its measureless light and depth ; their cup was pressed down and running over.

They talked and chatted, and billed and cooed, and enraptured and revowed, as only young lovers can in the fulness of their hearts, and when an hour or two had slipped by in this delightful manner, then they began to discuss the matter practically.

"Will you leave your friends, without acquainting them of your determination?" he inquired.

"No ; that would be cruel ; they would never cease hunting and searching for me, and it would break Kipawa's heart."

"Will you tell him all?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose he will object or attempt to dissuade you?"

"He is too good a man to attempt either. He will feel sorrowful, and so shall I, at the separation from those who have been such friends to me all my life—but he will wish me good-speed upon my journey."

"He must be a good man indeed, and I should like to go into the village and take him by the hand" said Hammond, who felt just then that he could take any one in the world by the hand.

"No," she replied; "do not show yourself in the village. You know why?"

"No," he answered, looking inquiringly at her.

"In the first place, they are always uneasy at the approach of strangers, and then, when it became known that you are the cause of my leaving them, some of the younger members might not feel so particularly Christian toward you."

"I see; it shall be as you say. I will wait your own good time and pleasure, praying you to remember that the days will drag wearily until we turn our faces eastward."

"I shall not be long."

"Two or three days, I suppose, will be all-sufficient?"

"Perhaps so, but I can not say with certainty."

"And there is no danger of your desiring to withdraw your consent; you can never be sorry for your promise."

"Not so long as you do not forget yours."

"Then it can never be," was the ardent reply of Hammond, as he again pressed her to him, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek.

She gently freed herself, and rising to her feet, stood calmly before him, looking lovingly and trustingly in his face.

"No," she said, after a moment's pause, "I do not think one of us ever will be sorry for this. You profess to love me, and I believe you, and I know, too, that you have the whole, undivided affection of Cecilia Almant—that she is yours, now and forever!"

But there must be an end to all things, and the lovers became sensible that several hours had passed since they met, and it was now past noon. Lamora moved toward the path, Hammond still holding her hand and walking beside her.

"I do not know which is the prettiest, your Indian or your Christian name," he remarked, as they walked slowly along.

"I am the most accustomed to the first, but I suppose I shall lose that when I leave them."

"It was not by which I first knew you, and I never wish

to forget it. There will be a charm clinging to it which can never lose its fascination for me."

"Well, you can call me by both," she laughed; "one will suit me as well as the other."

"Lanora," suddenly spoke up Hammond, "there are three white men near us; they are searching for gold. If they are successful we may all return to the States together."

"That will be safer, I suppose."

"They have been greatly alarmed by this strange—what shall I call it?—creature that makes his home near your village."

"It has not harmed them?" she asked, with a peculiar expression.

"No; but they are much terrified. Why not tell *them* the secret?"

"You know Kipwan's wish," she answered, earnestly. "I could not do so without his permission."

"I suppose not; but doubtless you can obtain it. This is an exceptional instance, and will be to our interest to have them acquainted with the facts."

She promised to ask the old chief's advice, and then moved along the path more rapidly. A hundred yards or so away her horse was found quietly cropping the grass and herbage. Without any assistance from her lover, Lanora vaulted lightly upon his back, bade Hammond a gay good-by, and the next moment had vanished in the direction of the Indians' home.

CHAPTER IX.

"I HAD A DREAM WHICH WAS NOT ALL A DREAM."

THERE could be no doubt that gold in abundance existed in the section of the country where the three men had located themselves. We have shown the discovery made by Black Tom, and showed, too, how narrowly he escaped falling into the hands of his enemies.

Teddy O'Doherty and old Stebbins took a different direc-

Hon, and without knowing it reached the same stream in which their comrade had found his nugget, but at a point considerably lower down. They were walking along in an indifferent manner, scarcely expecting to find the precious metal, and yet searching for it on "general principles."

"*Morra ! howly Vargin !*"

And with a panther-like leap and screech, the Irishman made a lap far out in the creek, dashed his hand into the water, as though he had caught at a salmon, and then he sprung back again.

"What in thunder is the matter?" demanded the amazed trapper, as he stood wondering whether his friend had suddenly turned crazy, or whether he had been struck by some silent arrow.

"That's the matther," replied Teddy, as he held up an irregular nugget of gold, the size of a hen's egg. "Isn't that 'nough to make a fellow dance the jig, as me uncle observed whin he resaved tidings that his beloved wife was no more?"

And, without farther words, Teddy tipped his hat upon one side of his head, placed his arms akimbo, *a la* Barney Williams, and executed a jig, dancing back and forth and around old Stebbins, who, having received the yellow nugget from his hand, smelt and tasted and "helteed" it, until no doubt could remain that they had secured a most valuable piece of pure virgin gold.

By-and-by Teddy became exhausted and ceased dancing.

"We've sthruick luck, haven't we?" he asked, as he nudged the old trapper in the ribs.

"Yas; thar ain't no gitting over that," he answered, as he landed back the heavy chunk; "that's worth *several* beaver hides. Why don't you take it?"

But Teddy declined receiving it.

"It's a present to you, to 'mind yees of this day's hunt."

"Thar's little danger of my forgettin' it," returned the trapper, as he carefully placed the prize in his pocket; "but s'pose we don't find no more."

"Little fear; but let's folly the sthraam down—hark!"

Both listened. As the channel of the stream was quite smooth at this point, scarcely any noise was made; but, as they

stood motionless and listening, they heard a distinct roar, the meaning of which was clear to all.

"The stream *kenyon* afore it goes much farther," remarked old Stebbins, as they resumed their progress.

One was on either side the stream, vigilantly searching the bed of the rapid stream, as they walked along; but they saw nothing more of the coveted silt, and every step they took brought them near the cañon, which could now be at no great distance.

Finally they came in sight of the place, where the stream narrowed and deepened and increased in velocity, while the banks rose to a height of twenty and more feet, so close in some places that a man could easily leap across.

The instant they caught sight of the cañon, Teddy O'Doherty started back, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Crazy ag'in!" asked the trapper, somewhat provoked at his performances.

"I've seen that place *afore*."

"When?"

"Last night."

Stebbins looked at him, as if he verily believed his head was turned. Before he could speak, Teddy added, in a voice free from all jest.

"I saw that place in a dhramm durin' the little sleep I secured last evening. Yis," he added, "jist exactly as I saw it there."

"Wal, what of it?"

"And I dhrammed that a little ways down the stream widened out, so that the stream run slower like, and there that was *gold*—yes, gold enough to make a *soot* like present to the Pope of Rome, and there it had been layin' for many long years, waitin' till Teddy O'Doherty should come along and scoop it up—and that's jist what Teddy O'Doherty is goin' to do this minute."

And diverging to the right, they began making their way up out of the valley, so as to come up around to the cañon at the top. Before they had reached, or were near enough to decide the point, the Irishman stopped again, and laying his hand upon the arm of his companion, said, in the same deeply earnest manner:

"Do yees belave me dhraam, Steb.?"

"I can't say yit," returned the trapper, reluctant to confess his faith in that, which, to say the least, had deeply impressed him.

"I dhraamed that the wilenin' in the kinyon was about a hundred yards below where the kinyon begins. Let us see whither it is true."

With an intensity of interest which it would be difficult to understand, the two men strode rapidly forward, their gait increasing almost to a run, as they neared the cañon. A few moments more and the question was settled.

The widening of the cañon was precisely as Teddy had dreamed!

Both men stood for several moments too astounded to speak. Then the Irishman asked, with a strange smile.

"Do yees belave it now?"

"Yes," was the awed reply.

"And do yees belave thar is goold down there?"

"I am sure of it."

"Thin all we have to do is to git it."

"Yes; that's the difficulty."

"And, be jabers, how is it to be done?" continued Teddy, with something like his natural joviality of manner. "I didn't *dhraam* that!"

They approached the edge of the cañon, and carefully examined it. At the point referred to it was nearly twenty feet in width; and, as this was very nearly the usual latitude of the stream, it flowed by this place as smoothly and quietly as upon the dead level.

Looking over the edge of the chasm, they could discern the edge of a table or ledge, which seemed to be the floor of some cavern that extended quite a distance back into the rock. This was the point which Teddy was desirous of reaching.

But how was it to be done? The natural plan was to drop down upon it; but as it projected at the most only a few inches beyond the perpendicular wall, it was morally certain that, if he should strike the edge, he could not "stick," while, so far as could be ascertained, it was too high above the stream to be reached by any one standing in the bed of that.

The only possible way, therefore, was to be lowered by

some rope, or something that would answer the same purpose, and such a thing was not in the possession of a member of the company.

"What shall we do?"

The two men stood silent, and debating the question with themselves. Neither had the remotest doubt of there being unbordered wealth lying within a few feet of them, and they were determined to reach it by some means or other.

As they stood looking about them, as if in search of something that would suggest help, the trapper started, and pointed toward the trees and woods, a short distance away.

"We'll git in thar," he said; "it ain't the time of year for bark to peel good, but thar ar' vines thar."

The next minute both were running at full speed toward the trees, where good fortune awaited them. There was found any quantity of grape-vines, which, by the aid of their knives, were speedily trimmed into the proper size and length.

They were not as flexible as could be desired, but, with the assistance of powerful muscles, they could be made to answer their purpose.

There was considerable to be overcome before they could hope for success. It was agreed that Teddy should leave his rifle behind upon the rocks, so as not to be encumbered with it, while he should grasp the vine in his powerful hands and lower himself to the table, when he could let go of his support, and be free to make his explorations. When he chose to ascend to *terra firma* again, he could do so by means of the vine, as he proposed to use it in descending in the cañon.

All this presupposed the fastening of the upper end of the vine, as it would be rather a too difficult task for old Stoddard to act the part of windlass.

By twisting it around a projecting point of the rock, this was finally accomplished, and then Teddy prepared for his descent.

He let himself carefully over the edge of the chasm, and the next moment was dangling over the cañon, with the trapper anxiously watching his movements.

Slowly down, down, sank the Irishman, until half the distance was descended, and he looked at his feet to make sure of reaching their support. Carefully the rough vine slid

through his hands, until at last he touched the edge of the table, and believing his support secure, he let go his hold, and stood at the mouth of the cavern.

As he looked in the twilight of the chasm, he saw something move, and instantly after, to his unbounded amazement discerned two Blackfoot Indians !

" Begorra ! but I didn't dhrame *that*, aither," he muttered as he prepared to defend himself as best he could.

CHAPTER X.

THE WONDERFUL CAVERN.

TEDDY O'DONERTY had no time to wonder how these redskins had got there. It was sufficient to know that he was thrown among them, and that there was no retreat for either party.

The Irishman anxiously peered into the cavern to see how many foes he had, but was somewhat relieved to find that he had but two to combat.

" Begorra ! if ye'd only lay aside yer wippons," he muttered, " and take yer shillaleh like a Christian mon, I'd welcome the chance that threw me in yer way, and as it is whoop, hurrah ! and come on, and the divil take yees !"

With which he executed a leap in the air, flipping one of his heels with the flat of his hand, and uttering a defiant whoop at the same time, as a challenge for his dusky enemies to advance to the encounter.

The two Indians were without guns, they having laid them down, no doubt, at some other place, but each possessed his tomahawk and knife. Teddy had his *cuchillo* also in his girdle, although it had not been left there with any thought that it would be called into requisition for any such purpose.

Instead of drawing his knife, Teddy placed himself in position, as though he were some pugilistic champion, with his fists as his bulwarks.

" Be jabers ! if I only had some place to back up ag'inst,"

he muttered, as he glanced over his shoulder. "I have the other side of this blamed old kanyon, but, as the same is twenty feet away, I can't lean against it very well, and at the same time, there's little danger of the spalpeens attacking me in the rear."

There was that consolation, truly, but Teddy stood in a very ticklish position, where a slight blow was likely to send him over the rock into the water below.

The Indians evidently looked upon themselves as masters of the situation; but, at the same time, they were very wary about attacking a man to whom such a bellicose attitude seemed to come very natural.

They made no outcry, but grasping their knives, and fixing their dark eyes upon the white man, like cats about to pounce upon their prey, they separated from each other, and cautiously advanced to the assault.

Teddy was no unskilful pugilist, and he saw that, barring any accident, he had the advantage of these daky assassins, despite the knives in their hands; for they knew nothing at all of the art of self-defense.

Several feet separated the hostile parties, when the Irishman made a lightning-like leap, sending out a terrific left-hander at the same time, "straight from the shoulder," that, striking the nose of the astonished red-skin, sent him turning several back-somersaults.

Wheeling with the same extraordinary celerity, he bestowed a similar compliment upon the other red-skin, and vigorously following it up, forced him over the edge of the rock into the cañon below.

Old Stebbins had not been long in detecting that something was wrong with his friend. He understood what his defiant stoop meant, and knew that he had dropped into a nest of Indians.

But how to help him!

There was no possible way open; for, if he should attempt to descend by means of the grape-vine, he would be at such a disadvantage that it would be nothing less than suicide. So he could only hold his side ready to seize the first opportunity that should present itself.

It was not long in coming. When Teddy toppled his

over the edge of the rock, he had scarcely reached the water below, when the sharp crack of the trapper's rifle rung above the din of waters, and the miserable red-skin floated away, as limp and lifeless as the garments upon his person.

"Now, give us another, Teddy!" called out old Stebbins, as he caught up the other gun.

But there was good reason why the other didn't come.

When Teddy turned to seize him, he saw him spring to his feet, and start backward into the cave with all speed.

"Be jabbers, yees can't run fur in that direction, as me mither observed whin the piggy run his head into the pratie-pot," exclaimed Teddy, as he dashed after him.

But it was impossible for him to take heed to his feet, and he had taken scarcely a half dozen steps, when a sudden rise in the floor of the cavern caused him to trip and fall forward, with no little violence, upon his face.

"Worrah, worrah, but that rock ain't very soft," he muttered, as he picked himself up, and rubbed his bruised countenance. "Where did that spalpeen go?"

At his first entrance into the cave, he naturally supposed that it extended backward but a short distance; but he had already penetrated a hundred feet, and there were no signs of its ending.

Nor did the light decrease. It was faint; but still, when the eyes became accustomed to it, sufficient to see one's surroundings. Looking ahead, Teddy saw a circular opening, through which this partial light of day entered.

"Be jabbers, but that's the place where the haythen come in!" concluded Teddy, as he paused in amazement and looked in that direction.

And while he thus stood gazing, the opening was darkened by a moving body, which almost instantly disappeared.

"That's the red-skin goin' on," rightly concluded the Irishman, as he hurried along after him.

For fully two hundred feet more, the wondering Teddy made his way along the subterranean cavern, looking neither to the right nor the left, but with his eye fixed upon the light opening, which seemed to shine like a beacon light to him.

When the opening was reached, he unhesitatingly walked out into the open air, and found himself on the bank of the stream, very near the point, where he and old Stebbins had left it.

"This route is much aiser than t'other," concluded Teddy, as he looked wonderingly about him, "and I rispect the sense of the haythen that used it to come in by."

Fixing the place in his mind, so that there could be no mistake about finding it again, he hurried to rejoin his friend.

The trapper, as a matter of course, was intensely excited and apprehensive. The sounds of the tumult below him, having suddenly died out, made it appear that Teddy had "gone under" by the hands of the treacherous Blackfeet.

While he was in this distressing uncertainty, he descried the Irishman hastening toward him. He raised his hands in amazement, but before Teddy could speak the trapper comprehended how the thing had come about.

"You've allers been a lucky dog, Ted, ever since we knowed you," he remarked, as the Irishman came up; "tell me all about it."

It required Teddy but a few minutes to do this in his own peculiar manner. He related every thing succinctly, from the moment his feet rested upon the edge of the rock to the time when he emerged from the cavern by its back door.

"Quaar that the red-skins war thar," said old Stebbins. "Thar don't seem to be many places in this country whar the varmints ain't. I wonder what they war doin' thar?"

"Don't yees sta it was the *gold*?" said Teddy, in a low, delighted voice.

"Did yer take a look 'round and see any of the yaller stuff?"

Teddy slapped his thigh a tremendous thwack.

"I knowed I'd furgot somethin', as me father observed, whin we raised the corpse of me nither, after givin' a mile to the church widout it. I was so interested in the haythen that I niver thought of the *gold*!"

"I'm afraid you won't find much thar," said the trapper, feeling somewhat of a reaction from the high hopes he had entertained.

"*It's there!*" was the confident assertion of Teddy. "I know it; that's what brought the haythen there."

"But they don't know the valley of gold."

"They know it's a handy thing to make ear-rings of, and that they kin git plinty of powder and lead fur it at the Forts."

"Wal, we'll have to take another look in thar. Shall it be you or me?"

"Why not both?"

The trapper shook his head.

"Ef it warn't fur the varmints we might, but they're too thick fur us to give 'em a chance to lock us up in thar."

"Yees are right," assented Teddy, who saw the prudence of his companion; "do yees act the part of sintinel, and I'll take a betther look at the insides of the cavern."

This was agreed upon, and the two set out for the bank of the stream, where the opening occurred. It was found to be nearly circular in character, like the mouth of an immense columbiad, so that an ordinary-sized man was compelled to stoop quite low to enter. The top of the bank projected over and concealed the orifice, so that there was little danger of seeing it, unless it was made a special search, or its existence was previously known.

"Do yer want yer gun?" inquired the trapper, as his friend was ready to enter.

"No; I kin do betther wid me fists on them spalpeens, ef there should be any of 'em in there. Do yees mind and not let any of 'em steal in upon me."

"Never fear for me."

With the faithful guard upon the outside, Teddy unhesitatingly re-entered the cavern, and began his explorations.

The cave in no place was found to be over twenty feet in width. The bottom was generally level, composed of rock and hard, dry earth. The sides were the same, the dirt crumbling beneath the touch like ashes.

Nothing unusual was observed until he had very nearly reached the scene of his affray with the Blackfeet, and here something *was* seen.

Teddy's heart gave a great bound, and his eyes sparkled, as he saw that he was really in a golden cave. It was all around him, beneath his feet, over his head, and on every hand.

It was like a gorgeous dream indeed; so like his night vision

that he kept moving about to make sure that it was not a repetition.

But no; he could see the yellow dust shining everywhere—that bright, glittering yellow, the dearest color in existence to half the world, and which will set nine-tenths of mankind crazy by the mere sight of it.

At first glance it seemed to Teddy that the gold existed only in the shape of dust or sand, deposited plentifully around him; but an examination revealed altogether a different and curious form of deposit.

Reaching up his hand, to scoop down some of the auriferous particles, he grasped instead a loose stone that was loaded with gold; the same thing was repeated until he made the discovery that it existed alone in that form.

It was as if a rock, nine-tenths of which was pure gold, had been blown to fragments in the center of the cave, the pieces burying themselves on every hand.

There was gold everywhere, and in abundance. There were thousands of dollars, and the trappers had but to secure it to secure to themselves comfort and opulence for the rest of their days.

Teddy stood for several minutes in silence, and then he heaved a great sigh.

"When I was at home in ould Ireland, I had two pockets big enough to thrust in three or four of the goats that was always wandering about our farm. Ah! if I only had them pockets now!"

And he ruefully ran his hands as far down in his trousers as they would go, and found they would not quite reach his knees.

"That's all, and that ain't half 'nough."

But he did the best thing possible under the circumstances. He began gathering the precious nuggets, and continued the work until his capacious pockets would hold no more, and there was imminent risk of their bursting with their overload.

Then he filled his hands and began laboring toward the entrance.

It proved a labor indeed, for the specific gravity of this precious metal is very great, and it was all he could do to reach the entrance with his freight.

Here, as may be supposed, the trapper was anxiously awaiting him. The load was distributed between them, and they set out on their return. "Headquarters" were reached without any thing unusual occurring, and there they awaited the coming of Black Tom.

CHAPTER XI.

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE.

THERE was an interested and anxious group gathered around the trappers' camp-fire, on the evening succeeding the adventures we have narrated.

The three were together, and they had taken all necessary precautions against danger from the Indians. The entrance to their underground house had been securely closed by means of an immense boulder, that was only shoved into position by means of their united strength, and the fire was kindled so far back that there was no danger of its being discovered by any one, not even by looking down the rent through which the smoke found its way out of the cavern.

The night was quite cool, and they had an abundance of fuel, so that every provision had been made for their comfort. They had eaten supper, too, although neither of the three had much appetite for it.

They were smoking, and, as a matter of course, discussing the all-absorbing topic of the day. Black Tom was the first to display his nugget with a triumphant air, which changed somewhat when old Stebbins produced a still larger one, and Teddy began to disgorge from what seemed his inexhaustible pocket.

The entire wealth was emptied into a heap, where the fire-light shone full upon it. The three contemplated it a few moments, and then removing his pipe, Tom grinned and asked:

"How many skins and peltries would we have to take into St. Loney to raise that amount of specie?"

"Several years work," replied his elder companion.

"Don't it look purty?" asked Teddy, who was stretched full upon his face, his fists placed one above the other, while his chin rested on the uppermost. "Begorra, there ain't any thing this side of ould Ireland that would do me eyes more good. What is it worth?"

This was the question all three had been turning over in their minds for some time, and each gave the result of his conjecture.

"I kin hit it purty near," said Teddy, who was squinting at it as though it were a target for his rifle. "I was always good at guessin'."

"Well, what is it?" asked Black Tom.

"Five hundred and fifty-four millions, six hundred and ninety-three pounds starling, more or less."

The Irishman was in earnest, and it was a long time before he could be made to believe that he had not gathered in more than five thousand dollars.

"It'll foot up that, any way," said old Stebbins; "and if we kin keep that up for a few days, it'll answer."

"You're sartin thar's plenty more thar?" asked Black Tom, looking toward the Irishman.

"Sartin!" he exclaimed, in amazement; "it's all over! There's tons of it; there's enough to make meself, and all me grandfathers and granlmothers, as rich as Queen Victoria, away back to the latest ginerations of posterity."

"You're crazy over it," replied Tom; "thar ain't half what you say thar is."

"Yees jist go wid me to-morrer, and saa fur yer-self."

"That's what I will do, ef the infarnal red-skins don't g joo thick."

"Or the beast," suggested old Stebbins.

"Be jabers! but we said nothing of him," said Teddy, who had scarcely thought of the strange animal up to this moment.

"I don't think he'll bother us, ef we look out for him; but what were them consarned Blackfeet doin' in thar?"

It was all-important that they should not overlook the personal danger involved in this matter. The encounter of Teddy O'Doherty with the Indians proved beyond all doubt that such a peril existed.

Much speculation and conjecture now followed. It was probable that the Indians had known of the existence of this gold mine for some time, and no doubt they had turned it to good account.

One of those nuggets, flecked and imbedded through and through with the pure gold, would purchase many necessities and luxuries for whatever red-skin chose to carry it to a trading or frontier post. It could be easily manufactured into the rude trinkets so prized by all native Americans.

Such being the case, it might be considered certain that the property would be disputed. Had old Stebbins been given the opportunity to finish, not one, but both the Blackfeet, their disappearance undoubtedly would be laid to the terrible "ringed and streaked" creature that was dreaded by white and red-men alike.

But the prize was worth fighting for, and the three men were ready and willing to risk their lives for the purpose of securing what they had labored so hard for during the many long years of the past.

Teddy proposed that they should visit the cave during the night, when there was little fear of their being molested, but the other two were reluctant to make the attempt in the dark.

The Irishman still urged his point with a vehemence that did fair to carry the day, when a noise at the entrance silenced every tongue.

"Hello in there! can you give a traveler lodging for the night?"

The voice was recognized as that of Fred Hammond, and all three instantly sprung to their feet and hurried to the entrance to admit him. He was regarded with strong friendship by all, from the unmistakable good will he had manifested toward them from the beginning.

A few minutes later he joined them round the camp-fire, and seemed in the best of spirits. Teddy had placed his nuggets, with no little precipitation, out of sight when Hammond's voice was first heard, so that he saw nothing of the real cause of their conversation.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed, when it was palpable to each of the three trappers that Hammond had been drawn to

their retreat by some extraordinary reason, which would be speedily made known.

Hammond was so well-bred, and so thoroughly self-possessed, that he made an easy matter of what would have been almost insuperable to another, and gracefully and in good terms he came to the point.

"Friends," said he, looking round in their faces with a smile, "you are hunters and trappers by profession, but you came here in search of gold—"

"And found it," interrupted Black Tom.

"Yes; I know you stumbled upon a nice little nugget, and doubtless you all believe there is plenty more of it in this section."

"Yis," answered Teddy, with a significance which the speaker did not get.

"Well, you are right," added Hammond, with great earnestness; "there is enough gold within your reach to make you all rich, and I have come here on purpose to shew you where to find it."

He paused and looked at them, and they at each other, but never a syllable was uttered.

"Now," he resumed, "it may seem that I am not entirely unselfish in this matter. There is a young lady among the Indian tribe near at hand, who has consented to accompany me home, and to become my wife. It was not *gold* that brought me here—it was *she*; and," said Hammond, his face aglow with pleasure, "I have obtained her. Well, we are to start eastward, on our horses, never to return here. You know, as well as I, the dangers that beset such a journey, and it's for that reason I wish your company."

"But how kin we go without the sponallicks?" asked Black Tom.

"I don't wish you to do so, and therefore I am going to put you in the way of obtaining all the wealth you want in a few hours."

"Would you have told us ef it hadn't been you wanted us to take care of yerself and gal?" asked old Stellins, with considerable bluntness.

"It is not I that wish to be protected and taken care of, out Lamora, the lady who accompanies me; but I will answer

your question. When I first saw you in this vicinity and suspected what you were after, I had not the remotest idea of imparting to you the secret I had obtained from my lady; but, when I had seen enough of you to believe that you were honest men, and deserving of better success, I suggested to Lamora that we should put you in the way of instantly acquiring that for which you were so anxiously searching, and she gave me permission, without a moment's hesitation, to do so."

"That makes it all right," said Black Tom, much pleased with the frankness of their visitor; "we'll shake hands on that."

"Yis; that makes things plisent, as me cousin obsarved, whin he and his gal broke their shillalebs over aich ither's heads."

"I exact only one condition," said Hammond, "and that is that you will each and all give me your promise to keep this matter a secret. It has been long known to the friendly Indians near at hand, and to some of the Blackfeet, and it is worth a great deal to them, while, if it should become generally known among the hunters and trappers, you know this place would be overrun with lawless men, and the Meagans would be compelled to leave the home which they hope to keep for the remainder of their lives."

The promise was readily given by all, and then Hammond proceeded to explain with great minuteness the very cavern which Teddy O'Doherty had explored. The three listened, until he had finished, and then the Irishman astounded Hammond, by remarking, with his peculiar chuckle:

"We're obleeged to you, Misther Hammoud, but we've already been thar!"

CHAPTER XII.

HUNTING WEALTH BY FIRELIGHT.

Yes, Fred Hammond was not a little astounded, as he learned by what a singular means Teddy O'Doherty had discovered the cave of wealth, and he listened to the close of his characteristic narration without interruption. When he had finished, our hero remarked, with a laugh :

"Then I have all my pains for nothing, since Teddy has developed such a remarkable genius for dreams."

"But yer intentions were honorable, as me father remarked, when me mither fired the gun at his head, and by mistake missed him, and therefor we give you credit."

"Yes," assented the others, "we're jist as pleased as though we had never heard of the cave afore."

"Thar's plinty of goold thar, is thar?" continued Teddy, in his eager way.

"Yes; I have been in the cave more than once, and have seen that there is an abundance—far more than you can carry away with you."

"And haven't yer taken any?"

"Not an ounce."

"Why don't yees?"

"That for which I was searching," replied Hammond, with a smile, "was worth more to me than all the gold in the Rocky Mountains."

"Spoken like a throe lover; jist as I always respectfully mentioned the name of me love; but doesn't yees intend to take any of the yaller stuff wid yer."

"Well, perhaps I may pick out a few chunks, although I ain't particular."

Teddy now renewed his proposition to search the cavern at night. They could build a fire within it, and secure all the gold that was convenient to carry, and by daylight be ready to start on their homeward journey, while if they waited until the morrow, they would doubtless have to make a desperate

fight with the Blackfeet, and very likely would be driven away entirely.

There was wisdom in this, and Hammond joined with him, for, he knew that, if the trappers should be ready on the morrow to start on their return, Lamora would be prepared also; and thus, such a proceeding would be entirely in his favor.

And so, after a few minutes more discussion, it was decided to visit the cave by night.

It was yet comparatively early in the evening, when the four men issued like so many shadows from "headquarters," and noiselessly made their way up the cañon. Teddy and Black Tom each carried a large pile of faggots on their shoulders, while the tall, stooping form of old Stebbins took the lead, with his rifle and pick.

The night was quite dark, there being scarcely any moon, while the sky was swept by numerous dark clouds, that seemed to indicate that a fierce storm was at no great distance.

They had gone but a short distance, when they paused and listened. Nothing but the mournful sighing of the wind could be heard, nor could any indication of danger be detected.

On up through the cañon they made their way—on up until they stood on the level prairie, when they turned off and plunged anew into the wild and rugged recesses of the mountains. Down again, until they seemed like miners descending into the bowels of the earth, when they reached the small stream in which gold had been discovered.

Along this they made their way, with the same noiseless celerity, no one uttering a word, till all four stood around the entrance of the gold mine.

Here they compared "notes," and it was found that not one had detected any thing suspicious; every thing appeared auspicious.

Nor did Black Tom nor old Stebbins had seen the interior of the cave, and they were naturally anxious to explore it. Hammond, therefore, volunteered to act as sentinel, while the three labored; but, before doing so, all four went in, and without striking a light, scattered and carefully reconnoitered the cavern to make sure that no enemies were within.

Everything proving satisfactory, Hammond returned to his station, and the fire was started. Teddy knew where

to locate it, and when the flame flared up, the eyes of the hunters sparkled.

"Bars and buffers!" exclaimed Black Tom, in a frightened undertone, as he looked wildly about him, "don't it beat every thing?"

"It does that," assented old Stebbins, whose excitement was scarcely less; "if we can tote that home, there'll be an end to our trappin'."

Teddy threw on the fuel, and the illumination was found amply sufficient. The yellow nuggets were shining all about them, and all that they had to do was to gather them.

There was something grotesque and weird in the scene. The vast, corridor-like cave, lit up by the burning wood—the shining glitter of the jagged wall—the three figures with their swarthy faces lit up, not by the fire alone, but by the eager passion that was stirring each heart to its utmost depths—all this made up a picture, impressive, unnatural, and almost appalling.

A spell seemed to rest upon the men for a few minutes. They were so overcome by this palpable evidence of the immense wealth lying within their reach, that they were forced to wait for the reaction.

Stepping forward, old Stebbins swung his pick over his head, and buried its point several inches in the compact earth. Then, as he forced the handle back, several nuggets dropped to the ground.

"Pick 'em up," he called out, in a husky voice, "and I'll keep yer busy."

Teddy and Black Tom gathered up the chunks, and deposited them in the huge sack, made of bear-skin, that had been brought for that purpose, while the old hunter piked the pick with a vigor that amounted to fury.

Only now and then did they speak, for they were swayed by strange emotions. Old Stebbins seemed literally reckless. Thump, thump, went his implement, like the thrumming of an engine. Now and then the fire was struck from the barbed point, and once it flamed with such violence as to fly from his hand, and go spinning, end over end, several yards away.

He walked to where it had fallen, and picking it up, without a word, returned to his labor, and drove it in again, the

chunks and nuggets falling with such continuity that the others had little time for rest.

The perspiration streaming from his face, and the dust gathering about his countenance, gave him a strange and unnatural appearance, such as is noticed upon the faces of the resurrectionists, when engaged at their hideous labor; but still he toiled on, silent, grim, and determined.

But the old trapper tired at last, and paused so exhausted that he could scarcely stand, and was unable to resist Teddy O'Doherty when he took the pick from his hand.

"It comes aisy to me, as I can swing it the same as a shillaleh."

His voice sounded like that of another person, and the attempt at jocularitv was terrible from its very ghastliness.

But Teddy swung the pick like a master of the business, and the fire glanced and flew, as the pieces were chipped off from the stones and rocks.

At first the work was comparatively easy, but it did not last long. The pieces were chipped off with greater difficulty, and were much smaller in size; but they were none the less rich, and the sack was gradually filled with its auriferous richness.

The fire was kept burning brightly, and by and by their task was finished. The three had loaded themselves down with the ore, until they had all they could hope to carry away with them.

Their wealth was now in their hands, and it only remained for them to transport it to where it could be made available.

They ceased from their toil and prepared to return home.

"Afore we go," said Black Tom, "I'll take a look outside."

"What fur?" asked Teddy, in surprise.

"To see whether there's any 'sign'."

"But Hammond is there, ain't he?"

"Yas, but there ain't no telling what might have tak place while we've been porrin' away inside."

As Hammond was much less experienced in frontier life than they, the others saw the cause of Black Tom's misgiving. The stealthy Blackfoot might have stolen upon him unawares, and, having silently slain him, as their race had often

done under similar circumstances, might be lying in wait outside until the trappers should walk into the ambush.

So it was arranged that old Stebbins and Teddy O'Doherty should remain where they were, or rather should retreat into the darkness of the cavern, and await the return of their comrade from his reconnoissance.

Black Tom moved away with the silence and stealth that had characterized his approach to an Indian camp, frequently pausing and listening for some indication of the danger that he feared menaced them; but nothing reached his ears, save the dull, faint murmur of the stream behind as it rushed through its narrow cañon.

It seemed to have lighted up somewhat on the outside since they had entered the cavern, as he managed to discern the faint outline of the opening, partly screened as it was by its peculiar conformation.

"I guess every thing is all right," he said, as he crept through the opening.

As he did so, a faint noise caught his ear, and looking somewhat to the left, he was startled by seeing the dreaded animal, with its rings and streaks, cantering awkwardly over the ground, while Fred Hammond was caressing and playing with it.

"Bars and buffers! what does that mean?" muttered the trapper, who could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes.

But such was the case; the dreaded creature, the horrid beast that was impervious to powder and ball, that crushed in the skull of a man at one blow, and was literally the terror of the country, was frolicking with their young friend!

"Come, old fellow, it is time you went home," suddenly exclaimed the latter, as he ceased playing, and pointed down stream.

The unknown obediently turned, and uttering its faint bark, trotted away, and speedily disappeared.

Black Tom concluded to say nothing of what he had witnessed to any one. He returned to his waiting friends and informed them that the way was clear. A few minutes later, and the three emerged from the cave, and, in the course of half an hour, safely reached "headquarters," with their newly-acquired wealth intact.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN TWO CLOUDS.

"Now," said Fred Hammond, after they had safely reentered their own cavern home, "you have made your fortune, and I suppose are ready to start homeward to-morrow."

A general assent followed, and Black Tom added that, on account of the Blackfeet, it was to their interest to get away without a moment's unnecessary delay.

"I will be here early in the forenoon with my lady, ready to accompany you. You will wait for me?"

"Yes; of course."

And the next moment Hammond had disappeared in the darkness.

It was only fairly daylight when our hero climbed a small tree, near the base of a spur of the Black Hills, that commanded a view of the Meagan village. Carefully concealing himself from view, he made a waving motion of a branch in his hand, repeated it several times, intently watching the result, and then descended to the ground and impatiently awaited the coming of Lamora.

Only a few minutes had elapsed, when a light step was heard, and the beautiful girl stepped timidly to view before him.

The delighted lover rushed toward her and clasped her in his arms.

"My own loved one!" he exclaimed, as he kissed the white forehead and pink cheeks, "are you ready to go with me?"

"Yes" was the faint, but immediate reply.

"We are all prepared, and only await your coming."

After some affectionate love-passages, they began to discuss their course of action in a sensible, practical manner.

Love had triumphed; Lamora had resolved to leave her Indian associations forever, and make her home with Hammond as his wife. That which would have been inexpressibly sad at any other time, now caused her scarcely a regret; nay,

she was anxious and almost impatient to leave Kipwan, her adopted father, and the savages who had treated her with such kind tenderness ever since her childhood.

When Hammond stated the preparations that had been made for their departure in a few hours eastward, she was somewhat surprised, but not displeased. She needed some time herself to get ready, and so, bidding him good-bye for the present, she hastily returned to the village.

She was trembling and excited, for this day marked an era in her life; but mingling with and permeating this feeling of uneasiness, was a sweet, happy anticipation as she looked at the future.

The meaning of her departure was made known only to Kipwan and his family. These, as a matter of course, were deeply affected, and the parting was painful in the highest degree to them. Yet, they interposed no murmur, but parted under the consciousness that in a few more years they would be united forever.

It was yet early in the forenoon when Fred Hammond and Lamora, mounted on their horses, rode down the cañon, side by side, to the spot where they had promised to meet the trappers.

They found Black Tom and old Stebbins there, but Teddy was absent. After Lamora had been made acquainted with them, the former said:

"Teddy has gone after the animals, and it's 'bout time he war back. I've been out 'round the country rickynorrin', and I have been back more nor half an hour."

"Did you discover any thing suspicious?" asked Hammond.

"Wal, not *particklerly* so; thar's red-skins, and plenty of 'em 'round, and every minute we stay h'ar is so much the worse fur us."

Old Stebbins had prepared a meal, of which he politely invited Lamora and Hammond to partake. The former declined, as she had eaten before leaving her Indian friends. The latter dismounted and made a hearty breakfast, while they were awaiting the coming of Teddy and the horses.

The appearance of the beautiful Lamora was the occasion of no little wonder and interest to the two hunters; they had

heard of her so often, and always in such a way, that they had come to look upon her as something almost supernatural, as invulnerable, in some respects, as the dreaded animal that had caused them so much terror.

Yet they were naturally gallant at heart, and gave no indication, of what was almost awe, that agitated them, as they gazed upon her wonderfully beautiful face and figure, as she sat quietly upon her fiery little pony, and awaited the action of her cavaliers.

While Hammond was within the cavern, making his breakfast, she chatted with the rough prairie men in a way that delighted them. They forgot the ever-present and increasing danger from the Blackfeet and the unknown animal; they failed to think upon the immense wealth that had so suddenly come into their hands. They only saw and heard the wonderful girl, as she sat on her horse, and held them spell-bound by the charm of her words and manner.

The precious nuggets that had been taken from the cavern on the preceding night, had been secured in different sacks, and were ready to be placed upon the backs of the animals, as soon as they should come. As their work in that line was now finished, they decided to leave their picks, shovels, and implements behind, so as not to be incumbered with any thing that was not really necessary.

Soon Hammond came out and stood beside his horse, and joined in the conversation.

"Do you feel any alarm about Teddy?" he inquired.

"No," was the somewhat hesitating response of Tom.

"But if he don't come powerful soon," added old Stebbins, "I'm gwine to start on a hunt fur him."

"Perhaps the horses have wandered some distance away," suggested Hammond.

"That's jist the trouble; thar's so many hundred things that might keep him, that thar ain't no guessin' the right one."

"Who is that?" asked Lamora, pointing up the cañon.

"That's Teddy now."

So it proved; the Irishman was discerned, on the back of one of the cantering horses, and leading two others that seemed very frisky and lively.

As they came near, it was noticed that Teddy's face was very red, as though he were perspiring, and it was evident that he was about as angry as he could possibly be. He had a horse on either side of him, each held by lankers that were twisted around his respective wrists.

The horse on the right had a habit of holding suddenly back, or starting spasmodically forward, that threatened to jerk the rider off his own animal; but as, at the critical juncture, the other horse gave a yank in the other direction, this catastrophe was prevented.

This kept Teddy upon his beast, but, at the same time, it was not pleasant to have the shoulders so nearly dislocated. As the only thing possible under the circumstances, he made furious and repeated attempts to kick the playful animals, but they seemed to know enough to keep out of his reach, and had a high opinion of the sport.

The fact was, they had been living in "clover" for the last few days, and they "felt their condition." They enjoyed it.

"Whoa, there!" shrieked Teddy, as he threw his body back, and grew still redder in the face, and the horses flung up their heads and laughed, so far as it is possible for an equine to smile. "If I only had my shillach, I'd break your heads! Whoa, there, ye spalpeens!"

It was amusing to the witnesses of these maneuvers, as the animals came prancing forward, and finally settled to rest in front of the party.

"What kept you so long?" asked Black Tom, as he and old Stebbins advanced and took charge of their respective horses.

"The ould boy got in them!" he replied, puffing from his severe exertions. "When I catched one, the others give me the slip and got away, and then when I catched them, the ither jumped over me head, kicked me over, and so the spalpeens kept at it, till I was nearly dead."

"But you succeeded at last," laughed Hammer.

"Succaded I did," replied Teddy, as he wiped off his perspiring forehead; "begorra, it was the greatest success of me life, as me uncle remarked when he was transported to Botany Bay. After I catched 'em, I jumped on the back of one, and went to shtrappin' the shtraps around me wrists, while,

Before I could finish, Black Tom's horse reared back and pulled me off one side, and as soon as I got on, old Stebbins' animal yanked me off t'other, and so it went. Begorra! ef they didn't stand and grin at me—hilloa!"

For the first time Teddy observed the presence of a lady. He paused abruptly, and looked quite embarrassed.

Hammond introduced him to Lamora, and the Irishman bowed with the natural gallantry of his race, and expressed his pleasure at meeting her, while she seemed quite pleased at the eccentricity of the Irishman.

There were but few preliminaries. The golden ore was carefully distributed among the three horses of the trappers, so that none was compelled to carry overweight, and in a few minutes all were mounted and ready to proceed.

It was arranged that Black Tom and old Stebbins should take the lead, while Hammond and Lamora, side by side, should ride next, and Teddy should bring up the rear. This was soon understood, and the company started.

It will be remembered that they were down in a deep, dry cañon, with high, precipitous cliffs and rocks upon either hand.

This cañon was followed up until it diverged from the other, when the hunters kept on, with the purpose of reaching the open, elevated prairie, at the point where the cañon properly began. This would bring them out near the base of the Black Hills, and after making their way for a short distance over a rugged country, they would then reach the rolling plain, with a free, open road toward the United States.

They reached the point of junction, and turned to the right, all riding on a walk, for they did not feel like hurrying until they had full opportunity to do so.

Naturally all were in exuberant spirits, and they were chatting with each other, and laughing at the jokes of Teddy O'Doherty. They had gone several hundred yards beyond the bifurcation of the cañon, and a gradual rise in the ground was perceptible, when Black Tom and old Stebbins suddenly drew their horses back on their haunches with a sudden imprecation.

"Look!" exclaimed Lamora, her face pale with excitement.

Following the direction of her finger, Hammond saw the cañon literally swarming with Blackfoot Indians! They were all mounted, and had completely blocked up the way in front of them.

"It's no go thar!" exclaimed Black Tom, as he wheeled his horse about. "Turn about and dash down the *kanyon*, and ride for life, for we're in a bad fix."

"See there!" gasped Lamora again.

All paused, transfixed with horror; for their retreat was blocked up by full as many Indians as was their advance! They were inextricably hemmed in!

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

It was an appalling situation indeed. There were fully thirty mounted and fully-armed Indians in front of them, not one less in their rear, and on the right and left rose the perpendicular sides of the cañon to a height of forty feet!

What was to be done?

The trappers had been in many fearful situations, and had passed through more than one frightful experience, but they had never been placed where they were so completely cut off from human help as now. No one could see a ray of hope.

Black Tom was the first to speak. As the group huddled together, staring affrightedly at the hideously-printed warriors that had ambushed and so completely outwitted them, he said, in a voice that was without tremor or quiver:

"Bars and buffers! this is what I call rough!"

"Is there no hope?" asked Hammond.

"I don't see the first shadow."

"Let's set up a Tipperary serenade and charge right down through them," said Teddy O'Donerty, who chuckled his lips, and meant every word he uttered.

"Can't we do it?" asked Hammond, who saw in the daring proposition of the Irishman, the fabled but the only hope

"There ain't no more chance of doin' that," replied the trapper, "than thar is of ridin' our horses up them forty feet of rocks, that ar' as straight up and down as the side of a house. Ain't that so, Steb?"

"As true as Gospel," replied the old man, looking fixedly at the red-skins.

"In the name of heaven, then, what is to be done?" demanded Hammond, in desperation.

"Nothin'," was the sullen reply of Tom, who had something of the Indian stoicism in the presence of the inevitable. "I ax only one thing."

"What's that?"

"That I could say good-by to the old woman and little ones at home afore I go under," he answered, as he drew his hand across his eyes; "but it's no use."

"Lamora," said Hammond, suddenly turning toward the fair girl, "what will become of *you*?"

"I do not think they will harm *me*," she replied. "I am known to many, and will probably be restored to Kipwan after—"

"After we are dead."

"No—no, don't say that," she said, with a quivering lip.

"But you see no hope for *us*?"

"No."

"And there is for *you*; thank heaven for that!" was the fervent exclamation of the young lover. "Lamora, the future was all sunshine to us, but the night has come sooner than we expected. Go back to your Indian friends again, for, after I am gone, you will find none so faithful. Bear me in remembrance, and I shall await your coming from the other shore."

"Don't—don't," plead the poor girl, bravely striving to keep up.

"Keep near me, Lamora, for when my last moment comes, as come it mus', let my last glance be fixed upon *you*—"

"Stop! stop!" she wailed, "or you will break my heart."

The Blackfeet took the matter quite leisurely. They had the whites in their power, and they indulged in a few whoops, by way of giving vent to their exultation, but still they made no immediate demonstration.

"There is no need of standing here," said Hammond, a few minutes later, "huddled together like a parcel of sheep, waiting to be shot down. Can one not make terms with them?"

"What'll you offer?" was the pertinent response of old Stebbins.

"Suppose I go forward, and voluntarily surrender the whole party, what then?"

"If it's any enjoyment to you, yer kin do it. Them Blackfeet ain't used to that kind of business, and bein' as we bored a hole in one of 'em yesterday, I don't think it's likely they'll think this ar' a good time to begin'; how-umever—"

"Hello! something is up!" exclaimed Hammond. "What does that mean?"

The Blackfeet who had so suddenly cut off their advance were now seen in the greatest consternation. They were shrieking, yelling, leaping from their horses, tumbling over each other—all wild and frantic to get out of the cañon! There seemed to be something in the very center of them that was like an exploding bomb-shell, and that caused all this panic.

While the whites were gazing spell-bound, they suddenly discerned the cause. A huge body, ringed and spotted in that unmistakable manner, was plunging among them, uttering short, sharp barks, while in the space of half a minute not a Blackfoot remained! Every one had fled!

"It is Jerval! it is Jerval!" exclaimed Lamora, as she descried the creature. "He has not forgotten me! thank Heaven!"

The brute seemed to hear her voice, and came lumbering down the cañon toward her.

"Bars and buffers!" growled Black Tom, looking uneasily about him, "I don't fancy *you* any more than the other varmints."

"He won't harm you," said Lamora; "he is my pet."

"And mine, too, as the gals always remarked when they set eyes on me," added Teddy. "I allers liked that critter, and now I *love* him. Come here, let me embrace yees."

"Go on, Jerval!" called out Lamora, pointing down the cañon toward the other Blackfeet; "drive them away, too."

But they had caught sight of the hideous creature, and they waited for no farther driving, but went tearing down the cañon, with the speed of the wind.

"Now, out of hyar, afore they kin cotch us ag'in!" exclaimed Black Tom; "let's git on the open prairie as quick as lightning."

The horses were put to their full gallop, and a few seconds later stood upon the high, level ground, free from all threatened peril. The Indians had vanished with such precipitous haste that not one of them was in sight.

Our friends halted a few seconds, while Jerval came plunging up the cañon after them. When he had fairly reached them, and began frisking around Lamora in his awkward way, Hammond dismounted, and said, addressing the three trappers:

"Before we leave this part of the country forever, let me explain a mystery to you. You have, like hundreds of others, been terrified about this wonderful animal, and I myself have heard many of the marvelous stories told about him. Let me say, however, that he has never killed a man, and never can, for he has not the ability, at least, when he appears in this shape--"

"What?" interrupted Black Tom; "do yer mean to say that he never clawed up nobody?"

"Never," laughed Hammond; "look here."

Stooping down, he busied himself for a few moments about the legs and body of the animal, and then uncovered him, and there stood before the astounded gaze of the trio a large Newfoundland dog, that instantly testified its vitality by attempting to leap up to Lamora, to receive her caresses.

While the trappers continued gazing in silent amazement, Hammond continued:

"Some years ago, when the Mexican Indians located in this section, they discovered the presence of gold about them. Knowing that this was liable to be found by the hunters that were constantly going back and forth through this section, they hit upon an ingenious expedient. Kipwan, the chief, had been given a young, intelligent Newfoundland dog by a trader, and, knowing the superstitions of the hunters and Indians, he got up this animal, which was made altogether different from any thing that had ever been heard of before. Making a number of

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